

Seeing Beauty

A Visual Exploration of Transformative Experience.

by

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Signed statement of originality

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with developing a visual language to explore the concept of immaterial reality as encountered through transformative experience.

Many individuals have had unique, and often profound, transformative experiences which have made them aware of a different order of reality. Following the experience, there is a certainty within the individual that an intangible aspect of reality exists, traditionally referred to as the immaterial or spiritual. The experiences are not exclusive to, or necessarily associated with, traditional forms of institutionalised religion and they are not automatically related to the occult. They can occur to any individual, regardless of age, sex, race or their location in time and space. The experiences are imbued with an archetypal form of beauty which permeates the individual's vision of existence. This deepened vision becomes part of their daily experience of reality.

Utilising archetypal imagery, light, pattern, symmetry, and geometry, I visually explore my transformative experiences. The exploration of the archetypal concepts of transformation, duality and the immaterial, has resulted in a body of work comprised of installations that incorporate video, photography and sound. Each of the seven works draws from my own subjective experience of reality, creating a highly personal, meditative, and immersive environment.

Personal transformative experience has prompted me to examine the metaphysical questions surrounding the human condition. This has resulted in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework for my art practise. I have engaged with writings from psychology, philosophy, mythology, modern physics and comparative religion, including the works of C.G. Jung, Joseph Campbell, Fritjof Capra and Paul Davies.

The same questions of existence stimulated by my transformative experiences have inspired artists throughout recorded history. My research is contextualised by contemporary artists who explore matters pertaining to the immaterial aspects of reality. Video artists, Bill Viola and Jordan Belson, explore their own subjective

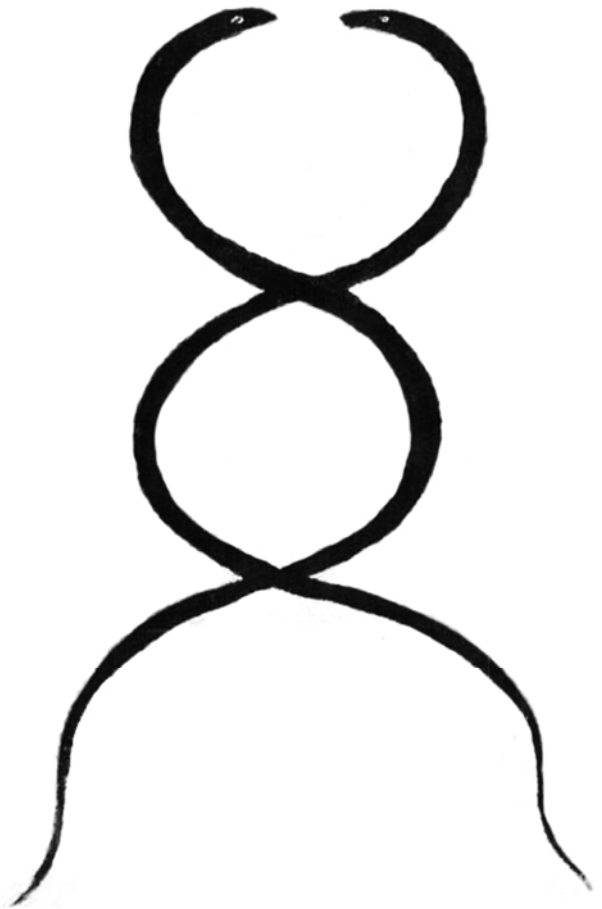
transformative experiences, while others explore humanity's spiritual connection with nature, or imbue their work with an invisible presence through an engagement with human perception.

I seek to contribute to my field through an examination of ancient archetypal symbols and ideas using new technologies. Thus I have utilised, computer generated imagery and digitally generated audio to represent the experience of revelation and create a metaphor for spiritual transformation. Additionally, my work links the idea of transformation and revelation to experiences of childhood; both through the recreation of experiences from my childhood as well as drawing on more recent events with my own children. These aspects combine to render an individual vision of a universal experience.

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Introduction

Humans experience reality through their five senses, *Seeing Beauty* visually explores a reality beyond normal perception. As a child, deeply fascinated by the human body, my parents presented me with a highly detailed pop-up book on the subject. It was in this book that I discovered that the human eye actually perceives reality upside down and the brain then reverses the image (Fig. 1).

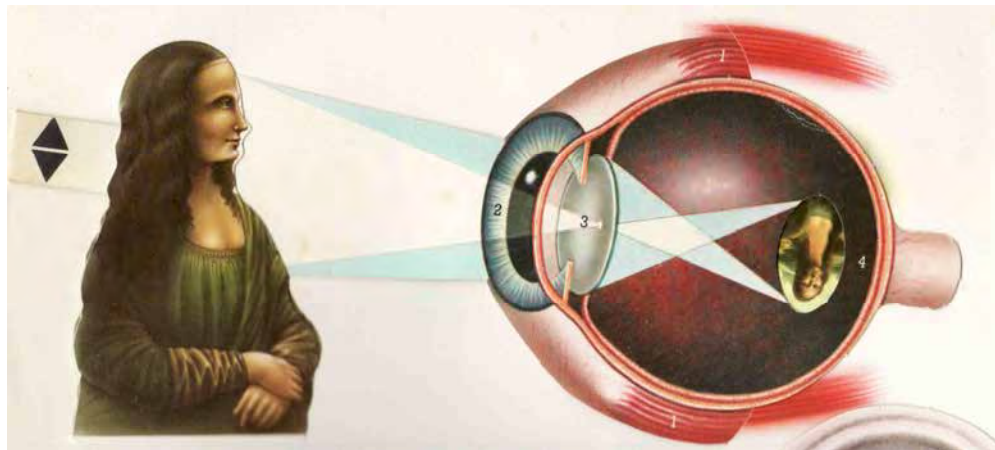


Figure 1 *Image from my pop-up book.*

Subsequent to discovering this information I spent a great deal of time opening my eyes quickly in an endeavour to see the world upside-down before my brain altered it. (I assumed that there was a lag time between the eye seeing and the brain interpreting.) I became fascinated with this in-between moment, it held a truth about reality which I thought, if I could only glimpse, I could see things as they really are.

Seeing Beauty is a visual exploration of personal transformative experience. My investigation aims to develop a visual language to explore the concepts of transformation, metamorphosis, duality and the immaterial, as encountered through these events. To create my work, I have drawn directly from experiences which have altered my perception of reality. To achieve this I employ; archetypal imagery, light, pattern, symmetry, nature and geometry to produce a final body of work comprising of seven installations that incorporate video, digital animation, photography and audio.

Through my investigation I seek to contribute to a vast visual language of the transformative experience. My particular view of transformative experience conveys a unique vision of an archetypal experience which is not associated with any religion, occult practices or traditional belief systems. I have utilised still and moving photographic images, installation incorporating found objects, computer generated imagery and various forms of audio to represent the transformative experience. Additionally, linking the idea of transformation and revelation to experiences of childhood; both through the recreation of past experiences from my own childhood as well as drawing on more recent events with my own children, renders an individual vision of a universal experience.

While this investigation focuses on the transformative experience and the immaterial aspects of existence associated with this, I have long created works that explore the mysterious aspects of life. My previous works took the form of an examination of the intangible in-between moments experienced in material existence. *She Hesitates* (Fig. 2) is a series of photographs of a figure just appearing or disappearing into or out of the frame. The work draws on the dream, or the film. The images are a depiction of the moments where one does not seem to exist, as in film where characters seem only to exist when they are being filmed.



Figure 2 Alyssa Simone, *She Hesitates*, 1999.

A work I created immediately prior to commencing my investigation foreshadowed many of the concerns I have explored through my research. The video piece was an intuitive response to W.B. Yeats' poem *Before the World Was Made*.

If I make the lashes dark
 And the eyes more bright
 And the lips more scarlet,
 Or ask if all be right
 From mirror after mirror,
 No vanity's displayed:
 I'm looking for the face I had
 Before the world was made.

William Butler Yeats, 1933.¹

The work depicted a mirror image of me trying on necklace after necklace (Fig. 3). A monologue accompanies the image, this was spoken from the perspective of the girl in the reflection. She described her mirror world as a world of silence and explained that she only existed when her material counterpart observed her. Every time she ceased to be observed, she ceased

¹ From 'Before the World was Made', 1933. Yeats, W. B. *Selected Poetry*. Edited by A.N. Jeffares, Macmillan, London, 1990, p. 167.

to exist. She calls this her death. Each time she dies she sees her material counterpart's true face – *the face she had before the world was made*.



Figure 3 Alyssa Simone, *Before the World Was Made*, 2003.

While my previous work was largely an intuitive response to existence, my investigation into the transformative experience has given me a conscious existential awareness, allowing me to see connections between ideas and concepts which previously seemed unconnected. My investigation has resulted in seven works which draw from my subjective experience of reality, creating a highly personal, meditative, immersive environment.

My exegesis is divided into three main parts and a conclusion.

Part one provides a detailed discussion of what entails a transformative experience. It outlines the role it has played throughout history and its archetypal nature. Included in this discussion are detailed accounts of the various transformative experiences I have encountered over the course of my life. Following this I outline the difficulties one happens upon when describing experiences which go beyond everyday experience. I then examine the place of the transformative experience in a contemporary Western context. Finishing with an explanation of the effects the experiences can have on the individual.

Part two examines the artists, both in an historical and contemporary context, who contextualise my work. I discuss artists who engage in a visual exploration of transformative experience, the immaterial aspects of reality, the limits of human perception and humanity's deep connection with nature. Through these artists' works we encounter the spiritual, the invisible and the underlying fabric of reality expressed through geometry. These works engage us in the vast mysteries of existence impenetrable to normal human perception.

Part three outlines how my investigation was pursued. It aims to reveal my journey of visual exploration into transformative experience. It begins by describing the experiences which sparked my investigation. Followed by detailed accounts of the various processes I undertook to create each of the seven works.

The final chapter concludes the exegesis with a summary of the contributions I aim to make to my field of investigation.

Part I: Transformative Experience: a deeper view of reality

Part one of my exegesis is divided up into six sections, presenting a detailed discussion of transformative experience. It introduces the concept of transformative experience by defining the term within the context of my investigation. The section entitled *A Personal Experience* discusses the various events which I have based my investigation on in detail. *An Archetypal Experience* places the transformative experience in an historical context and emphasises the important role the experience has played throughout humanity's existence. *An Ineffable Experience* discusses the ineffable nature of such events and how attempts have been made to overcome the inadequacies of language. *A Contemporary Experience* discusses the place of the transformative experience in the materialistic West. It outlines various movements which have acted as an antidote to the dominant paradigm, the most recent renewing both an academic and general interest in transcendent experience through the use of entheogens. Finally, *A Deeper Perception* concludes this section by outlining the effects the transformative experience has on individuals.

Beyond Normal Perception

The term transformative experience can be widely interpreted to comprise a myriad of possible experiences. It is undeniable that a large variety of human experience often alters an individual's general outlook on life and potentially changes behaviour. Experiences such as the epiphany, a phenomenon defined as 'a sudden intuitive insight into the essential meaning of something'², have the ability to enhance and enrich human existence. However, such experiences are not examined. For the experience to be

² Simpson, J. & E. Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

transformative in the context of my investigation, I have confined the meaning of the term to those experiences which alter the individual's perception of reality.

Many individuals have had unique and often profound transformative experiences which have made them aware of a different order of reality. The experience expands the individual's vision of material existence, convincing them there is more to reality than they had previously known. Following the experience there is a certainty within the individual that there exist aspects of reality intangible to the human senses; these aspects have been traditionally referred to as the immaterial or spiritual. The experiences are not exclusive to, or necessarily associated with, traditional forms of institutionalised religion and they are not automatically related to the occult or occult practises. They can occur to any individual, regardless of age, sex, race or their location in time and space. The awareness the experience affords the individual is frequently seen by them as life enhancing, often providing them with existential meaning, resulting in people who are happier and more empathetic. The experiences are imbued with a type of beauty which transcends the everyday meaning of the word. It is an archetypal form of beauty, which following the experience, permeates the individual's vision of existence. This deepened vision becomes part of their daily experience of reality.

Albert Einstein acknowledged this form of beauty in his essay, *The World as I See It*:

The Fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious... A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms – it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude; in this sense and this sense alone, I am a deeply religious man.³

³ Einstein, A. *The World as I See it*. John Lane, London, 1935, p. 4.

Einstein spoke of the sense of wonder and amazement, of the knowledge of the existence of that which is impenetrable to human perception, as the most beautiful emotion. A transformative experience bestows on the individual an awareness of this reality which exists beyond normal perception.

A Personal Experience

My investigation seeks to contribute to a dialogue on transformative experience and the immaterial aspects of reality experienced through such events. In the following section, I discuss the various personal transformative experiences I aim to explore through my visual practice. I examine four broad areas of personal experience which include; transcendent experience, synchronicity, modern physics and spirit photography. The discussion of each form of transformative experience includes an example of personal experience. I begin my discussion with the more profound experiences which fall under the general term of transcendent experience.

Transcendent Experience

...like watching people dancing through an open window.
They seem a little mad at first,
until you realise they hear the song you are watching.⁴

The transcendent experience is a naturally occurring phenomenon within the human being. It is a spontaneous, sudden, short-lived, profound and deeply personal insight into existence. It is defined as an experience whereby an individual perceives or experiences that which is 'beyond the limits of normal perception'.⁵ To paraphrase Maxwell and Tschudin, the individual

⁴ Chérout, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, p. 12.

⁵ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 197.

gains an awareness of a reality which transcends them, a reality which extends beyond their experience of the everyday.⁶

Over the last century psychologists have employed numerous terms to describe experiences which transcend the perception of everyday reality. Often the terms adopted to describe these experiences are burdened with problems of interpretation. Originally, when discussing experiences of a transcendent nature, the term 'religious experience', coined by W. James in his lectures of 1901–1902, was used.⁷ The term religious experience is now generally used and understood to be an experience particular to the concept of institutionalised religion. Today, transcendent experience is the most accepted term used to replace the often misinterpreted religious experience, as the events are seldom associated with the beliefs surrounding traditional religious systems. Maslow states that following the experience each experient 'discovers, develops and retains their own religion'.⁸ The term mystical experience is also fraught with difficulties of interpretation, as the experience may not always be associated with traditional ideas of mysticism.⁹

In their book *Seeing the invisible*, Maxwell and Tschudin outline the characteristics of the various transcendent experiences and divide the experiences into individual categories. While each category is defined by their own distinctive characteristics, there seems to be two elements common to all transcendent experiences. These are; a heightened perception of reality and an altered perception of time and space.

Auditory and visual perception are the most common senses effected during the experience. Individuals often refer to the intensity or brilliance of light, 'the field of my vision grew brighter, a kind of dancing brightness like heat

⁶ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 14.

⁷ James, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a study in human nature*. Collins, London, 1963, p. 489.

⁸ Maslow, A. *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. The Viking Press, New York, 1970, p. 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

over sand...'¹⁰ They also report synaesthesia, (a mixing of the senses) such as seeing music or tasting colours. One experient describes his experience of synaesthesia as, 'The sun sang and the road sang. The music shone.'¹¹ Regardless of the form the heightened sense takes, the experiences are described as a glimpse 'of something more real than obvious reality'.¹²

The events which occur within a transcendent experience are perceived by the individual to be independent of the generally accepted view of space-time. Time is often perceived by the experient as merely an abstract construct of the logical mind rather than a finite fact. It has been described as 'something that has no beginning or end and therefore, enfolds everything and all time'.¹³ Individuals, who report an altered perception of time and space, often state the experiences are, with a few exceptions, transitory and short lived. Despite this they also describe them in terms of endlessness or timelessness.¹⁴ Often associated with an altered perception of time is a feeling of oneness with the universe.

The transcendent experiences which occur with the most frequency are characterised by a sense of unification, they are referred to as mystical and peak experiences. The individual describes a loss of the ego and experients commonly describe a connection with all things, regardless of scale. An experient expresses their experience of oneness as being '...perfectly conscious of where I was and of my immediate physical surroundings, but for that brief moment it was as though my whole self was able to expand to and encompass the furthestmost star'.¹⁵ Maxwell and Tschudin state that this sense of oneness imparts an intuitive understanding of a universal source of knowledge.¹⁶ In other words, the individual gains an insight into reality and their place within the universe. This is illustrated by the following example

¹⁰ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 50.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹² Ibid., p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

of a mystical experience I had on a return journey home from Nepal at the age of 20:

I was travelling on a bus looking out of the window, when quite unexpectedly I saw a glimpse of the ocean. In that moment my entire field of vision became luminous, everything seemed to glow with an intense, warm light. The source of the light did not come from the sun, it seemed to be emanating from within the things which made up my field of view. My consciousness seemed to expand outwards into everything and at the same time everything contracted into me. With this expansion and contraction there was a sense of knowing. A knowledge that existed on all levels was revealed to me. I had the sensation that the past, present and future were an inseparable whole, and that the concept of time was a mere abstraction. I was filled with a sense of beauty, and with this beauty was a feeling of love. It was a type of love I had not experienced before, I felt love and loved, it was all encompassing, all pervading and all consuming, there was no separation.

In the example above, immediately prior to the experience my focus was on the ocean. Nature frequently plays an essential role in the mystical experience and is perhaps partly responsible for triggering the event. The individual's attention is often focused on a natural phenomenon, this can range from a magnificent sunset to a humble pot plant, or like for William Blake, the grains of sand. While standing on a beach contemplating grains of sand in his hand, Blake experienced a mystical experience which shaped his life. He immortalised this experience in this famous verse from his poem *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.¹⁷

While the mystical experience seems to occur quite spontaneously, the peak experience is triggered by situations such as love, sex, childbirth, dance and

¹⁷ Gilchrist, A. & A. Gilchrist. *Life of William Blake*. Macmillan, London, 1863, p. 94.

aesthetic insight.¹⁸ In the following example, the situation which triggered my experience was love:

We walked through the gardens on our way back to the car hand in hand, brilliant smiles on our faces. On our path we came across some stairs. I began to walk up the stairs still holding his hand. Everything I am about to describe happened simultaneously and the experience lasted for only a few moments. Time changed, it slowed down almost to a halt. I felt as if I was moving in extreme slow motion. My vision became filled with a golden light, the light became so intense I could hardly see. For that moment, myself and everything around me seemed to disintegrate and become light. I lost the sensation of touching the ground. I remember the light as being incredibly beautiful and of being filled with it. I experienced intense emotion – an emotion of beauty which was at the same time love. The experience came with a profound sense of knowing, a knowing that all was as it should be and it had always been and always will be.

A transcendent experience can also be induced by the group of psychoactive plants and chemicals known as entheogens.¹⁹ For the transcendent experience to be induced with entheogens the physical and emotional situation of the individual is of utmost importance. Maslow claims that substances such as, ‘LSD and psilocybin in the right people under the right circumstances can produce a peak experience’.²⁰

In my early 20s I had the opportunity to try the entheogen Lysergic acid diethylamide or LSD. Before I took it, I researched the effects of the substance and read *The Psychedelic Experience*, written by Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert & Ralph Metzner. The book is based on the *Tibetan Book of*

¹⁸ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 197.

¹⁹ ‘The term entheogen is used to supplant the pejorative term hallucinogen and the ethnocentric neologism psychedelic when discussing psychotropic or psychoactive plants and chemicals’. (See: St. John, G (ed). *Rave Culture and Religion*. Routledge, London, 2004. p. 125). The term entheogen was first coined by Ruck, Bigwood, Staples, Ott, and Wasson in 1979 and literally means ‘becoming the god within’. (See: Ruck, C. Bigwood, J. Staples, D. Ott, J. & R. Wasson. ‘Entheogens’, *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*, Vol. 11, Jan–Jun(1-2) 1979, pp. 145–6).

²⁰ Maslow, A. *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. The Viking Press, New York, 1970, p. 27.

the Dead and is described as a manual that carefully outlines the possible range of experiences obtained through the use of entheogens. Following my research, I chose to ingest the LSD on a warm summer's day in St David's Park, Hobart. Unexpectedly I had a very powerful revelatory experience which I feel is summed up succinctly by the words of American comedian, Bill Hicks: '... all matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration, we are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively, there is no such thing as death, life is only a dream, and we are the imagination of ourselves.'

There are several other transcendent experiences which fall outside of my experience; however they are very closely related. Some are defined by particular factors occurring within the experience. These factors include; a sense of presence which is referred to as a numinous experience, and experiences involving visions or voices known as prophetic or visionary experiences. Additionally, closely related to the transcendent experience is the near-death experience. This experience is defined by the various stages common to the experience, including; a feeling of peace and quiet, a buzzing noise, moving through a dark tunnel, an out of body experience, meeting others and finally, a being of light. While not every individual who dies and recovers, almost dies or believes they are going to die, has a near-death experience, a significant proportion do. The effects the near-death experience has on individuals are often similar to that of the other transcendent experiences.

While, the transcendent experience is a profound subjective, intuitive insight into a different order of reality, there are other more subtle experiences which are sometimes easy to overlook. One such experience is synchronicity.

Synchronicity

Synchronicity was coined by psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, he describes it as ‘the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state...’²¹ In other words, the subject experiences one or more meaningful coincidences. Despite the use of the word coincidence, the occurrence and sequence of the events are at times so bizarre that it is difficult to put them down to mere coincidence. In his book entitled, *Synchronicity: an acausal connecting principle*, Jung illustrates the term by describing an experience he had while treating a patient:

A young woman I was treating had ... a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. While she was telling me this dream I sat with my back to the closed window. Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, like a gentle tapping. I turned round and saw a flying insect knocking against the window pane from outside. I opened the window and caught the creature in the air as it flew in. It was the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes, a scarabaeid beetle, the common rose-chafer (*Centonia aurata*), which contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt an urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment.²²

The events in a synchronicity experience often occur in an order which do not follow the classical view of causality, that is, the notion of cause and effect. If causality was in effect in the above example, the patient would have dreamt of the scarab following the event and not before. Thus Jung declares synchronicity to be independent of the concept of space-time and he refers to it as an acausal event.²³ To further illustrate how these events can become increasingly complex, here is a description of an experience I had about a year ago:

²¹ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 36.

²² Ibid., p. 31.

²³ Ibid., p. 7.

While working in my studio one afternoon I completely lost track of time. I usually tell the time from my computer and I felt it was rather mad to turn it on just to see the time. I expressed lament for my wrist watch that I had lost two years previously. The watch had held considerable sentimental value. I lost the clock face in the grass at the back of our house while racing to the car one morning to catch the ferry. I searched everywhere for it but could not find it. Although I had given up on finding my watch, I wished for it back. Knowing it was lost, I was forced to make the decision to buy a new one. The day after my lament for my old watch, I was at home looking out of the back door. In the period between losing my watch and this point in time, we had excavated the area at the back of the house where I had lost my watch. The dirt from the excavation had been dumped in four different places, near the water tank, in the middle of the paddock, near the fruit trees and at the base of a dam. About a year after the dirt had been dumped, a massive pumpkin plant spontaneously grew at the base of the dam about thirty meters from our house. We were quite amazed at the plant and wondered where the seed had come from as our vegetable garden was some fifty metres in the opposite direction. On this day I noticed for the first time that the enormous plant seemed to be growing several huge pumpkins. I walked over to investigate, as I was interested to see how many pumpkins had started to grow. After briefly examining the plant I turned and began to walk back towards the house. I had taken about five steps when I came across the clock face of my watch sitting face up on the dirt. I picked it up. The feeling I had in the instant I saw my watch was one of a magical quality, it made me giggle. It was a little dirty but seemed intact. I took the watch to the jeweller the next day and had a new battery put in it. It worked perfectly. Incidentally, I was quite excited about finding my watch and told people the story of how I had found it. But each time I told someone the story about finding my watch, it would stop for about 15 minutes. I stopped telling the story ...

Synchronicity challenges the physicist's classical view of causality, forcing the individual to reconsider the basic meaning of change, probability, coincidence and the singular events in our lives.²⁴ The acausal principle is illustrated in the above example by the spontaneous growth of the pumpkin.

²⁴ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 7.

It seems that the pumpkin grew there in order for me to find my watch. Its growth was timed such that the day after I expressed a wish for my watch, the pumpkins had grown to such a size that they sparked my interest enough to go over and look at them. Although I had viewed the plant several times, I had never seen the watch. Additionally, I would never have gone near the base of the dam if the pumpkin had not spontaneously grown there. If the watch had been found randomly, there would not be a story, however, it was found face up on top of the dirt the day after I had expressed a wish for it back. Furthermore, the experience of synchronicity was not new to me, I had been experiencing it since childhood and by this stage I had read Jung's book on the subject. Jung points out that the conscious acknowledgement of synchronicity causes it to happen with greater frequency. He claimed that when he was on, what he refers to as *the right path*, meaningful coincidences seemed to happen quite regularly, he almost expects them.²⁵ His description of *the right path* is not a new idea, it parallels the concepts of *the way* or *karma* within Eastern Mysticism. Jung claimed that synchronicity makes a significant 'impression on people and seems to have a certain numinous quality'.²⁶ By numinous he means a magical quality, a presence which enters the individual's daily life, often manifesting itself as a heightened awareness of the sublime nature of existence.

Jung states that the possibility that events like the ones described above are coincidences is highly unlikely. He proposes that it is more reasonable to suggest that acausal events are the result of an unexplainable phenomenon. He says that, 'It is difficult to look around the macro physical world and point out acausal events, but that does not mean they do not exist. Their existence or at least their possibility follows logically from the premise of statistical truth'.²⁷ This means that, the series of meaningful coincidences as described above are statistically more likely to be the consequence of what he refers to as an *unexplainable phenomenon* than a coincidence. He also suggests that the occurrence of such unexplainable phenomenon implies a

²⁵ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 13.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

hidden order of reality that is concealed from normal perception. Jung proposes that within the Western view of reality we seem to be overlooking this hidden order of reality.

The Western view of reality is largely based on the ideas of what Jung refers to as empirical science. This form of science is based on the scientific methodology that is described as ‘predicated on hypothesis formation, observation, experimentation, measurement, prediction, [and] replication’²⁸. It is the testable, quantifiable view of reality, the traditional reductionist viewpoint of science. Jung states that, ‘the experimental method of enquiry aims at establishing regular events which can be repeated; consequently, unique or rare events are ruled out of account’.²⁹ Even today this form of science is often presented as knowledge containing absolute truths. In reality empirical science is a collection of statistical truths, there are no absolutes. The scientific method of experimentation calls for a given occurrence to be true up to a certain percentage for it to be fact, no scientist will ever quote a result to be 100 percent definite. In addition, we frequently overlook the fact that scientists form theories and then endeavour to find evidence to support or disprove those theories. It is important to remember that theories are only that, theories. It follows that, this manner in which science operates causes it to be in constant flux, the facts are forever changing. The film director Andrei Tarkovsky described science as a never ending staircase of knowledge of the world which ‘is successively replaced by new knowledge, with one discovery often being disproved by the next for the sake of a particular objective truth’.³⁰

Jung also points out that it is important to consider that, every answer is ‘influenced by the kind of question asked and the result is always a hybrid

²⁸ Aldridge, A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: a sociological introduction*. Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K. , Malden, Mass, 2000, p. 209.

²⁹ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 7.

³⁰ Tarkovsky, A. *Sculpting in Time: reflections on the cinema*. Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair, University of Texas Press, Austin, United States, 1987, p. 37.

product’.³¹ Astrophysicist, Sir Arthur Eddington explains this through an analogy of a fisherman:

In a seaside village, a fisherman with a rather scientific bent proposed as a law of the sea that all fish are longer than one inch. But he failed to realise that the nets used in the village were all of a one-inch mesh.³²

Jung concludes in *Synchronicity* that the ‘so called *scientific view of the world* is a psychologically based partial view of reality which misses out aspects of reality which cannot be grasped statistically’.³³

According to Jung, the experience of synchronicity is the result of an order of reality we cannot perceive. Although traditional forms of empirical science have failed to provide explanations for these unique events, a particular aspect of modern Physics, the study of the subatomic world known as quantum physics further substantiates Jung’s argument. He states that the ‘discoveries of modern physics have changed the scientific picture of the world, that is, they have shattered the absolute validity of natural law and made it relative’.³⁴ This is due to the fact that ‘...in subatomic quantities, prediction becomes uncertain because they no longer behave in accordance with the known natural laws’.³⁵ In other words, the subatomic world itself is of a different order in that it behaves in accordance with its own laws. Therefore, statistical truths (as far as they are truths), which are the basis of empirical science, are only valid when dealing with macro physical quantities, that is, they are relative only to the macro physical world, hence, Einstein’s *Theory of Relativity*.³⁶ In order to fully understand the meaning of this statement, the discoveries of modern physics, in particular quantum physics, must be explained.

³¹ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 7.

³² Zee, A. *Fearful Symmetry: The Search for Beauty in Modern Physics*. Macmillan Pub. Co., New York, 1986, p. 280.

³³ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 7.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Transformative Experience and Modern Physics

All things by immortal power,
Near or far,
Hiddenly,
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower,
Without troubling of a star.

Francis Thompson.³⁷

Like many artists I am inspired by the intriguing findings of science, especially the form of science which asks you to believe in the invisible. I was walking past the Uni bookshop one day, a book caught my eye, this particular book changed the way I view reality. The book was *Other Worlds* by physicist Paul Davies. It was my introduction to quantum physics and began a long fascination with the subject which extended into fundamental physics. While it partly confirmed aspects of reality I knew intuitively, it opened up a plethora of new possibilities. Transforming the way I thought about reality and providing me with a language in which to describe many of my own experiences. The following is a description of what I discovered from Paul Davies book, *Other Worlds*:

Quantum physics developed out of two important theories, Quantum Theory and the Theory of Relativity.³⁸ Quantum theory began as an attempt to explain certain technical aspects of subatomic physics.³⁹ Between 1900 and 1930 several scientific discoveries were made which changed the way in which reality is viewed. One of the most significant was that, on the atomic level ‘matter remains in a state of suspended animation of unreality until an actual measurement or observation is performed.’⁴⁰ To put it simply, subatomic particles do not appear to exist in this reality until someone

³⁷ Davies, P. *Other Worlds: Space, Superspace and the Quantum Universe*. Penguin, London, 1990, p. 56.

³⁸ Davies, P. *God and the New Physics*. Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1984, p. vii.

³⁹ Davies, P. *Other Worlds: Space, Superspace and the Quantum Universe*. Penguin, London, 1990, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

observes them. ‘This curious state of limbo corresponds to atoms being caught between many worlds, undecided where to go.’⁴¹ ‘If accepted literally, it leads to the conclusion that ... the universe that we actually perceive – is not the only one.’⁴² Our universe exists in a ‘superspace’ of universes, some vastly different, others almost identical, and these ‘are not always completely disconnected from our own: they overlap our perceived universe and jostle its atoms.’⁴³ The implications of this are indeed mind boggling. It implies that ‘reality ... is not a property of the external world on its own but is intimately bound up with our perception of the world ...’⁴⁴ This conclusion carries great significance ... ‘for unlike all the previous scientific revolutions, which have successively demoted humankind from the centre of creation to the role of mere spectator of the cosmic drama, quantum theory reinstates the observer at the centre of the stage.’⁴⁵ Further to this, laboratory experiments carried out in the 1970s and 1980s ‘have demonstrated that atoms and subatomic particles, which people usually envisage as microscopic *things*, are not really things at all ... Yet we are all made of atoms ...’.⁴⁶

These discoveries have significant implications to the nature of reality, how we view it and our part in it. It seems that we are more intimately connected to nature than we once supposed.

In response to the discoveries of quantum physics, a small number of modern physicists, the intellectual descendents of Einstein, began to search for a single theory to explain the ‘fundamental design of nature’.⁴⁷ Known as fundamental physicists, they seek a single unifying theory to explain reality on all levels, including the unruly subatomic world. These physicists found that they had to re-evaluate and change the way they thought about reality,

⁴¹ Davies, P. *Other Worlds: Space, Superspace and the Quantum Universe*. Penguin, London, 1990, p. 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Zee, A. *Fearful Symmetry: The Search for Beauty in Modern Physics*. Macmillan Pub. Co., New York, 1986, p. xi.

‘they learned to approach their subject in totally unexpected and novel ways that seemed to turn commonsense on its head and find closer accord with mysticism than materialism’.⁴⁸

The general notions about human understanding ... which are illustrated by discoveries in atomic physics are not in the nature of things, wholly unfamiliar, wholly unheard of, or new. Even in our own culture they have a history, and in Buddhist and Hindu thought a more considerable and central place. What we shall find is an exemplification, an encouragement, and a refinement of old wisdom.⁴⁹

Fundamental physics lead them towards ‘a view of the world which is very similar to the views held in Eastern Mysticism’.⁵⁰ The new way of thinking these physicists and other academics were grappling with, is a more holistic view of reality which includes humanity’s intimate connection with the universe. Similar to the experience of the transcendent experience, it is a view which involves the notion that there is a basic oneness to the universe, as physicist, Fritjof Capra, points out in the *Tao of Physics*:

The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central characteristic of the mystical experience, but is also one of the most important revelations of modern physics. It becomes apparent at the atomic level and manifests itself more and more as one penetrates deeper into matter, down into the realm of subatomic particles.⁵¹

It is said that fundamental physicists can have a similar experience to a transcendent experience when they gain insight from an intricate knowledge of the order of the universe. The opposite also seems to be true, that a transcendent experience somehow gives the individual an intuitive understanding of the universe similar to the knowledge acquired by a

⁴⁸ Davies, P. *God and the New Physics*. Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1984, p. vii.

⁴⁹ Capra, F. *The Tao of Physics: an exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism*. Flamingo, London, 1992, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Davies, P. *God and the New Physics*. Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1984, p. vii.

⁵¹ Capra, F. *The Tao of Physics: an exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism*. Flamingo, London, 1992, p. 142.

fundamental physicist. Both the physicist and the individual who undergoes a transcendent experience perceives a oneness and harmony that is expressed in the recognition of the pattern, symmetry and order of the universe. The spiral for example, exists on all levels of reality from the seashell to the structure of our galaxy.

While the astounding discoveries of modern physics have not been fully integrated into Western culture, Paul Davies has discerned that ‘fundamental physics is pointing the way to a new appreciation of humans and their place in the universe’.⁵² Theologians, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, artists and anyone ‘in search of a deeper meaning in their lives, find their beliefs about the world very much in tune with the new physics’.⁵³

According to the discoveries of modern physics, once again, any number of unexplainable phenomenon are possible; the list is limited only by our imagination. One such phenomenon which may possibly be validated by the findings of modern physics is spirit photography.

Spirit Photography

A unique characteristic of photography has always been its ability to record the visible, material world with truth and accuracy. Yet from the 1860s onward, photography has also been enlisted to provide proof of the immaterial: auras and apparitions; séances and levitations; transfigurations and the spirits of the deceased.⁵⁴

So far I have illustrated that there are several ways you can step outside of the ordinary way of seeing. In the case of spirit photography the camera is partly doing this for you. The term spirit photography refers to photographs which contain an anomaly which was not visible at the time of taking the

⁵² Davies, P. *God and the New Physics*. Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1984, p. vii.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Chéroux, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, p. 8.

photograph; this anomaly is attributed to the presence of a spirit of the deceased. Spirit photography can be found in both an historical and contemporary context.

Historical spirit photography dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These photographs were manipulated by the photographers of the time, and contained an apparent apparition appearing out of the background (Fig. 4).



Figure 4 William Mumler, *Master Herrod with the spirits of Europe, Africa and America*, 1870-72.

Approximately forty years after the invention of the camera, a large spiritualist movement was witnessed in the West. The occult became fashionable and boasted advocates, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It was believed that the camera, following Muybridge's photographs⁵⁵, could see things the naked eye could not, and the spiritualist movement advocated the use of the camera as proof of an afterlife. Later, in the early 20th century, spirit photographs were created to take advantage of those who lost loved ones during World War I. The spirit photographs of this time were generally formal portraits of individuals, with an apparition often surrounded by an

⁵⁵ Edward Muybridge's photographic study of galloping horses revealed that the camera could record things that the naked eye could not see.

ethereal mist, or 'ectoplasm' as it was often called. Some photographs contained objects such as flowers or written messages from the dead (Fig. 5).

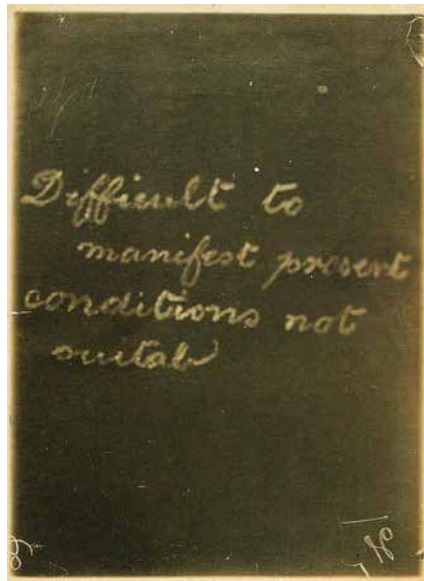


Figure 5 M.J. Vearncombe, *Psychograph*, 1919.

An exhibition on historic spirit photography was housed at both the *Maison Européenne de la Photographie* in Paris and the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York in 2005. *Le troisieme oeil: La photographie et l'occulte* or *The Perfect medium: Photography and the Occult* displayed a large collection of images of historic spirit photography and photographs of mediums of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Fig. 6).



Figure 6 *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2005.

The exhibition includes several photographic experiments, such as; photographs of fluids and the photography of thought, known as thoughtography and skotography (Fig. 7) which is an image of a spirit taken without a camera or light.

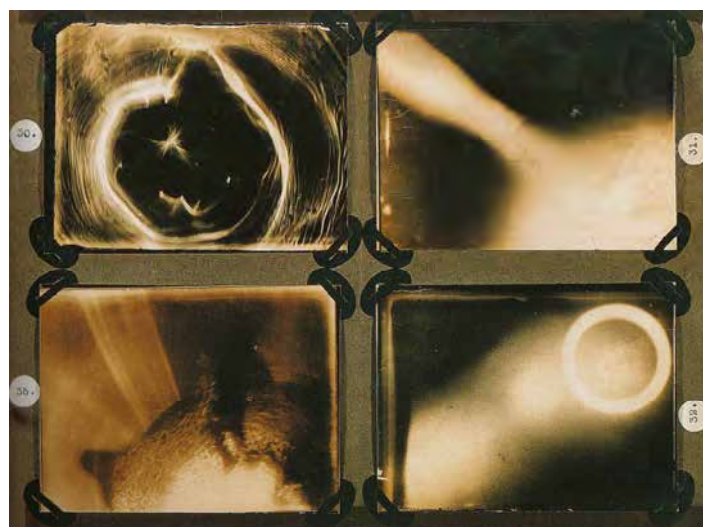


Figure 7 Madge Donohoe, *Skotograph*, c.1930.

Clearly, because of the widespread knowledge of the use of photographic manipulation, these images are not accepted as evidence of a spirit within contemporary Western society.

Contemporary spirit photography is somewhat different to its historical counterpart. Present-day photographs contain abstract anomalies which cannot be attributed to common photographic artefacts. These anomalies are attributed by many individuals to spirits of the dead and are categorised by enthusiasts into three main types: 'orbs', 'ectoplasmic vapour' and 'vortices'. A 'vortex' is a tornado-like anomaly within a photograph. 'Ectoplasmic vapour' is identified by a white swirling mist varying in opacity.

The most common anomalies in the contemporary spirit photograph are known as 'orbs'. They appear as balls of white light which vary in size, number and opacity. 'Orbs' are usually relatively small in size and can be

captured individually or in groups. Some have been photographed moving around the frame, leaving a trail of motion blur behind them (Fig. 8).



Figure 8 Debbie Malone, *Photograph of orbs moving around frame*, c.2001.

Several other forms of photographic anomalies which do not fit into these categories appear as lights, unexplained shadows or unexplained objects.

Contemporary spirit photography enthusiasts exist throughout the Western world. They have devised a new language and theories to describe the unexplainable anomalies within these photographs. They use an array of equipment including; still cameras, video cameras, digital audio recorders, electromagnetic field meters, thermal scanners, motion detectors and infrared night vision scopes (Fig. 9).⁵⁶ Despite all their efforts with the application of such equipment, most contemporary spirit photographers agree that the best equipment in their endeavour to prove the existence of spirits is still the camera.

⁵⁶ Coghlan, A. 'Midnight Watch', *New Scientist*, No.2165/6/7, 26 December - 2 January 1998, p. 43.



Figure 9 The New Scientist, *Midnight Watch*, 1999.

The anomalies captured in spirit photographs are elusive, transient and unpredictable. These unexplainable phenomenon do not to comply with the scientific method and as far as scientific understanding is concerned, the true nature of the anomalies may remain an enigma. Despite the fact that the spirit photograph is not hard scientific evidence of the existence of spirits, the experience can cause a shift in perception. Some individuals who take a spirit photograph can have a similar experience to synchronicity.

Many of these individuals describe an accompanying physical experience in addition to capturing the photographic anomaly. The *dual* cognitive and physical experience causes a profound change in their perception of reality. Ultimately, the experience provides them with an insight and understanding of their existence which was previously absent. My first experience of spirit photography illustrates the change in perception caused by the capture of an orb within a photograph:

The three of us drove from Bondi across to Waverley Cemetery just before midnight. Paul selected some eerie piano music playing on the radio, we laughed at the coincidence as it set the scene perfectly ... although it did unsettle us a little ... This was our first 'ghost hunt.' I had found an article in the New Scientist which discussed the ins and outs of contemporary ghost hunting and spirit photography. The exact procedures of obtaining a 'spirit

photograph' were outlined on a website called the International Ghost Hunters Society. As we drove through the dark streets towards the cemetery, I briefed the others on the standards and protocols of the ghost hunt ... They are as follows;

- *ask the spirits of the dead for permission to take their photograph*
- *no smoking*
- *no alcohol*
- *no ouija boards or séances*
- *do not take photographs during adverse weather conditions such as rain, mist, fog, snow or windy/dusty conditions*
- *remove all dust spots and fingerprints from camera lens*
- *avoid shooting with flash at reflective or shinny surfaces*
- *avoid shooting when foreign objects are floating near the camera*
- *show reverence and respect in chosen areas*
- *a positive mental attitude is important for all investigations.*

We parked the car. It was a clear, calm moonlit night. We walked tentatively towards the cemetery. The graves were covered in vines and the closeness of the graves began to make me feel a little claustrophobic. Once on a wide open path, I relaxed. After walking around for a little while, we began to take photographs. We each shot off a role of film and Paul shot 40 photographs on his digital camera. We were not expecting too much as this was an experiment. We were open to what would happen. It was fun, a little adventure for all of us. We did something we would never normally do and that was good for us. We returned home to look at the digital photos. We looked carefully at each one and towards the end there was an orb in a photograph. We were amazed and excited. We were determined to capture more and to find out more about this phenomenon. We endeavoured to keep our minds open and not jump to conclusions. But even so it began to change my view of the world.

Our reliance on direct retinal experience as the basis of our beliefs in reality is deeply imbedded in Western culture. In this sense the photograph is an object of immense power and influence in our society. It is not difficult to think of images which have changed the world as we know it. It is generally agreed that the photograph is a direct representation of reality and therefore,

the photograph represents truth. What continues to make photography distinct is the original presence, a referent in the material world that at some time did really exist.⁵⁷ Reality may have been transcribed, manipulated or enhanced, but photography does not cast doubt on reality's actual existence.⁵⁸ The snapshot in particular continues to exemplify this element of truth for many individuals within our society. The photographic image has been described as 'the simultaneous presentation of life and death, and it is ... neither life nor death, but the haunting of one by the other'.⁵⁹ It is at once proof of existence and life as it records presence and in the same instance it is an absence. The photograph is the death of a moment which can never be relived and each photograph is a reminder of one's own mortality.⁶⁰ Photography becomes an entanglement of absence and presence, death and life.

Although the concept of spirit photography is not entirely acceptable to contemporary Western society's version of reality, it does have an effect on some individuals. It changes them, provides them with comfort, hope, beauty and a sense of awe in existence. Here is one such story from a woman who saw an image in a window, (images seen in the patina of objects are known as simulacrum):

While on a ghost tour in a small town about an hour out of Sydney, I met a woman also in the tour during the tea break. After talking to her a little about spirit photography and the tour we were on, she very carefully produced a photograph from her handbag. She held it to her chest and said to me, 'I want to show you something.' I felt from her tone and body language that she was about to show me something very precious to her. The photograph she handed to me was a snapshot of herself in her kitchen, it was taken at night and she was standing in front of a window. She told me it was taken shortly after her father had died. She pointed to the darkened window where there was a type of mist which appeared to me to be condensation on the window.

⁵⁷ Batchen, G. *Burning with Desire: the conception of photography*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1997, p. 212.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 193.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

She pointed to a particular spot in the window and said 'There, that is my fathers face.' I tried hard to see the face but could not. Seeing my confusion, she then lay the photograph on the table and masked it with other pieces of paper so the area where her father's face appeared was all that was visible. I still did not see the face but I did see her desperation for me to see it and I said, 'Yes, I can see it.' She smiled a smile of relief and said, 'When I saw this photograph I knew my father hadn't really left me, he is with me all the time.'

The photograph was imbued with meaning and it was the photograph itself which proved to this woman the existence of an afterlife and provided her with the comfort she needed in her time of grief. The photograph was proof for her of truths about reality and existence.

When we consider the intimate relationship photography has had with death, the orders and levels of representation within the spirit photograph become increasingly complex. The photograph is described as a simultaneous representation of absence and presence. The spirit photograph acts as a medium between two worlds. The living and the dead are at once represented in a space between life and death. Therefore, the spirit photograph is 'a space of uncertainty, a troubling movement back and forth in the very grain of photography's logic.'⁶¹ It disturbs identity, system and order and does not respect boundaries and rules.⁶² The dead are transformed; photography reanimates them into a new existence, a new meaning. The spirit photograph is death that does not entirely part from life, it can be described as 'death infecting life and life infecting death,' and therefore, according to Kristeva, it is abject.⁶³

While these entities are abject in their in-between, ambiguous space, their existence is edged with the sublime. The sublime moment comes in the

⁶¹ Batchen, G. *Burning with Desire: the conception of photography*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1997, p. 173.

⁶² Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

realisation of love beyond death and at these moments ‘the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us ...’⁶⁴

An Archetypal Experience

The transcendence of biological nature is a universal phenomenon of humankind.⁶⁵

Humans have had experiences that have altered their perception of the everyday world throughout human history.⁶⁶ The awareness of the immaterial aspects of reality that the transformative experience produces is evident in our ancestors long before the existence of modern Homo sapiens, extending back into the early Palaeolithic era. Evidence of the belief in the immaterial in early hominid species is found in the form of art and music, commonly used in ritual. The use of ritual implies belief in another higher order of reality to which the humans are subject to. Evidence of ritual burial, implying a belief in an afterlife, is found later in the Palaeolithic period, when Neanderthals and archaic Homo Sapiens inhabited the planet.⁶⁷ In light of this evidence, Hay argues that it is feasible to assume that transformative experiences are part of our biological make up and are accordingly, archetypal.⁶⁸

An archetype is ‘the original pattern or model from which copies are made: a prototype’.⁶⁹ Jungian archetypes are imbedded deep within the human psyche, they are described as, ‘a pervasive idea, image or symbol that forms

⁶⁴ Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 210.

⁶⁵ Aldridge, A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: a sociological introduction*. Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K. , Malden, Mass, 2000, p. 27.

⁶⁶ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Campbell, J. *Historical Atlas of World Mythology*. Perennial Library, Harper & Row, New York, 1988, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Hay, D. *Exploring Inner Space: scientists and religious experience*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Simpson, J. & E. Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

part of the collective unconscious'.⁷⁰ The collective unconscious is the concept that there are unconscious ideas and experiences that are universally fundamental to all human beings, they are 'inborn'.⁷¹ Due to their biological nature within the human species, archetypes remain the same from culture to culture, traversing time and space. Each culture applies a different cultural costume to the archetype. This is known as mythology.

Fundamentally mythologies assist the self conscious human being in coming to terms with their own death, the ultimate transformative experience. The human beings awareness of their mortality is generally referred to as *the human condition*. The conscious awareness of the past and the future prompts human's to pose fundamental questions regarding creation, life and death. The response to such questions of existence shape the basis of religious and philosophical thought across the planet. Resulting from the metaphysical contemplation of the human condition are various theories. While the various schools of thought may differ widely in certain aspects, there is a surprising amount of agreement between them. In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley examines a selection of sacred texts from the various world religions to demonstrate they are in their essence in agreement.⁷² The idea that all religions and systems of belief are fundamentally the same is referred to as the *common core theory*.⁷³ The differences are usually in the form of habits, behaviours and dogmas. In general these differences are dictated by the particular time and space each experient found themselves in. Maslow claims that the differences between religions are superficial, peripheral and expendable.⁷⁴

Jung refers to the transformative experience as the rebirth archetype. Evidence of the rebirth archetype is found in all forms of human mythology.

⁷⁰ Simpson, J. & E. Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

⁷¹ Jung, C. G. *Four Archetypes: mother, rebirth, spirit, trickster*. Routledge, London, 2001, p. 2.

⁷² Hay, D. *Exploring Inner Space: scientists and religious experience*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 90.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Maslow, A. *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. The Viking Press, New York, 1970, p. 20.

Muhammad isolated in a cave, Jesus alone in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights, and Buddha deep in meditation under a Bohdi tree, are all good examples of this. Maslow states that at the essence of 'every known high religion has been the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer'.⁷⁵ The transformative experiences of these particular individuals are used by each religion to authenticate it. It is reasonable then to hypothesise that these religions and their mythology are based on the same kind of experience, the rebirth archetype.

An Ineffable Experience

Transformative experiences go beyond what we know about reality and therefore, by its very nature, are outside the realm of language.⁷⁶ Language relies on common experience in order for us to communicate ideas. When the experience extends beyond what is commonly experienced by all linguistic difficulties become apparent. Often individuals are unable to find the adequate language necessary to describe transformative experience and in this sense the experiences are ineffable.

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, from *The Republic* illustrates the problems which arise when discussing subject matter which falls outside of everyday understanding:

... Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light ... here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way ... Like ourselves, ... they see only

⁷⁵ Maslow, A. *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. The Viking Press, New York, 1970, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 17.

their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave ... To them, ... the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.⁷⁷

Plato describes individuals in the cave who are released from the chains. They are able to turn around see the fire, the others, themselves and the outside world. They then endeavour to describe to those who had only the experience of the shadows, what a reality more real than their shadow reality was like. Plato's allegory highlights the inadequacy of language when attempting to describe experiences which extend beyond normal perception.

Transformative experience highlights the inadequacies of language. Joseph Campbell stated that, 'the ultimate word in our English language for that which is transcendent is *God*'.⁷⁸ For many experiences descriptions fall well short of the actual event and they find words 'a pale reflection of the sublime character of the experience'.⁷⁹ Consequently, transcendent experiences are often described using metaphors like; 'behind the veil,' 'an opening of a window', or 'the lifting of the corner of a curtain'.⁸⁰

As the ideas of Quantum physics begin to penetrate main stream Western society, ideas surrounding transcendent experience, synchronicity, fundamental physics and spirit photography are beginning to change. Physicist, David Bohm invented new terms to describe his theories. For example, the 'holomovement' is a term Bohm invented to describe the underlying structure of the universe. Doug Renselle has taken this concept one step further and has invented a whole language based around Bohm's theories. This language is called *Quantonics* and looks like this: 'Frææ wihll issi ihntrinsihc, but mihtigatæd by mahssihve ænsehmbles æf frææ wihllings, ihncluding nature's æwn frææ wihllings.'⁸¹ Bohm's theory of the

⁷⁷ Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Desmond Lee, Penguin, Harmondsworth, England, 1955, p. 256.

⁷⁸ Campbell, J. *The Power of Myth*. with Bill Moyers, Doubleday, New York, 1988, p. 49.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁸⁰ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 15.

⁸¹ Renselle, D. *Quantonics*. <<http://www.quantonics.com>>, (accessed 16 March 2009).

Holomovement explains the nature of reality and has an uncanny similarity to the experience of unification in the mystical experience.

For experiences of the mystical or peak experience, it is very difficult to describe events in terms which do not include the separation of space and time, subject and object. The very structure of our language fragments reality, it separates things into you, me, here, there, and so on.⁸² Quantum physicist David Bohm states that the pervasive structure of our language leads 'in the whole of life to a function of thought tending to divide things into separate entities, such entities being conceived of as essentially fixed and static in their nature'.⁸³ This view of reality 'carried to its limit ... arrives at the prevailing scientific world view, in which everything is regarded as ultimately constituted out of a set of basic particles of fixed nature'.⁸⁴ If one holds on tightly to this scientific view of reality, it becomes practically impossible to comprehend transformative experience.

The difficulties which arise when attempting to describe and discuss transformative experience are largely due to the view the West has had on such events. For centuries the significance of the transformative experience has not been generally accepted in Western culture. Much of this is owed to the particular scientific view of reality which dominates the West today.

A Contemporary Experience

Materialism is the result of the ideas which came into prominence following the *Age of Enlightenment*.⁸⁵ Regardless of this, transformative experiences

⁸² Hay, D. *Exploring Inner Space: scientists and religious experience*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 88.

⁸³ Bohm, D. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. Ark Paperbacks, London, 1983, p. 37.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ In the period between 1630 and the end of the 18th century, movements occurred in France, Great Britain and North America. These movements were referred to as the *Age of Enlightenment*, the *Age of Reason* or the *Dawn of Modernism*. The *Age of Enlightenment* initiated the ascent of the 'scientific method'. (See Gay, P. *The Enlightenment: an interpretation*. Vol.2, Knopf, New York, 1966–1969, p. 6). Scientific methods were applied to most areas of human activity and we see the birth of new sciences, such as sociology and

continue to occur with great frequency and immaterial aspects of reality come into our society in many forms. Very recently the scientific and academic worlds have renewed their interest in transformative experience. Subsequently, views on the subject are beginning to change.

Sociologists describe the contemporary Western world in terms of detraditionalisation, globalisation, MacDonaldisation, risk society, ecological instability and postmodernity, an unsettling place which gives rise to individual existential dilemmas.⁸⁶ A detraditionalised society is a society where traditions, beliefs and rituals have been slowly eroded or commercialised. Ultimately, the contemporary world threatens the individual with meaninglessness. While this state of affairs results in many individuals in the West searching for meaning in the material, that is, consumerism⁸⁷, the immaterial aspects of reality have not been eradicated altogether.

In many aspects of our society the immaterial aspect of reality continues to play a significant role in an individual's life. The persistence of the immaterial is partially due to the fact that many individuals continue to have transformative experiences, shifting their view of reality.

psychology. (See Himmelfarb, G. *The Roads to Modernity: the British, French and American Enlightenments*. Vintage, New York, 2008, p. 8). Descartes in his *Discours de la Methode* states that science was 'to be desired not only for the invention of an infinite number of devices that would able us to enjoy without any labour the fruits of the earth and all its comforts, but above all for the preservation of health, which is doubtless the first of all goods and the foundation of all other goods in this life'. (See Gay, P. *The Enlightenment: an interpretation*. Vol.2, Knopf, New York, 1966–1969, p. 6). The development of these ideas were seen as an emancipation of the European mind, and saw the slow crumbling of the bonds of Christianity, aristocracy, and social hierarchy. (See Brinton, C. *The Portable Age of Reason Reader*. Viking Press, New York, 1956, p. 1).

⁸⁶ Aldridge, A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: a sociological introduction*. Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K. , Malden, Mass, 2000, p. 185.

⁸⁷ Consumerism has been defined as 'the active ideology that the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences'. (See Aldridge, A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: a sociological introduction*. Polity Press: Cambridge, U.K. , Malden, Mass, 2000, p. 186). Individual identity is often expressed through the 'purchase and display of consumer goods ...' (ibid., p. 189) A consumer driven society implies that consumerism determines the values in society, resulting in a universal and impersonal culture of mass production and mass consumption. (ibid.) Consequently, the individual is dehumanised and regarded as an anonymous consumer rather than a citizen. (ibid.)

Today, Western society celebrates the immaterial principally through the entertainment industry; in film, television, games, the internet and literature. Mainstream popular entertainment is saturated with the immaterial in the form of science fiction, psychic abilities, magic, mythological beings and spirits of the dead. Belief in fairies, Father Christmas and the Easter bunny, among others, are widely encouraged in children. Reports of abduction by extraterrestrial life-forms are a common occurrence. Many individuals continue to participate in institutionalised religions asserting belief in the immaterial. Finally, many individuals who are not a part of any organised religion, including many scientists, still believe in something other than the material quantifiable reality we are presented with everyday.

Over the last 400 years the West has witnessed a number of movements which have acted as an antidote to the scientific/materialistic model of reality. Each of these movements has seen a renewed interest in subjects which the dominant scientific viewpoint has for the most part ignored. In the Victorian and Edwardian era's spiritualism flourished, and spirit photography, séances, and psychic research thrived (Fig. 10).⁸⁸



Figure 10 Theodor Prinz, *A Ghost*, 1900.

The 1960s witnessed a massive cultural upheaval largely caused by the widespread use of the drug LSD (Fig.11). Amongst many other subjects, the

⁸⁸ Aldridge, A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: a sociological introduction*. Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K. , Malden, Mass, 2000, p. 209.

movement stimulated interest in eastern mysticism, mystical experience and alternative psychotherapy.



Figure 11 Poster for Acid Test, Muir Beach, United States 1965.

Following the material decadence of the 1980s, the West once again became preoccupied with an alternative to the material and we see in the 1990's the advent of the *New Age*.⁸⁹



Figure 12 Graham Hale, *New Age shop and Healing Centre*, Market Place St Albans, Herfordshire, UK, 2009.

⁸⁹ The *New Age* is a term which encompasses a large variety of cultural phenomena and was at its height in the 1990s. It was resistant to formal organisation and hierarchy. In general, it rejected scientific methodology, institutionalised religion, questioned professional expertise, had a commitment to ecology and affirmed feminine imagery (See Aldridge, A. *Religion in the Contemporary World: a sociological introduction*. Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K., Malden, Mass, 2000, p. 209). Many claimed a direct lineage back to paganism and drew from the wisdom of ancient civilisations and native peoples. Unfortunately, the majority of those involved were not concerned with whether these traditions were invented or true. From this plethora of knowledge came a range of activities, therapies, books, DVDs, courses and so on, promising healing and spiritual fulfilment (ibid.). Often the ideas behind this movement were all packaged into neatly commodified products, ultimately, becoming a commodified stylistic option alongside all the others (ibid., p. 211).

Over the last decade the *New Age* has become slowly integrated and absorbed into mainstream Western society (Fig. 12). The effects of the phenomenon have been two-fold. First, the commercialisation and lack of true understanding of ancient and indigenous system of beliefs has significantly undermined their value. Second, there has been a renewed interest, both generally and academically, in alternative therapies and complementary medicine. Amongst these is a renewed interest in the role that entheogens, play in transformative experience.

‘Drug use has been historically associated, not only with medicine and the treatment of disease, but also with religion and the attainment of enlightenment.’⁹⁰ Many cultures across the world have developed rituals which induce a transcendent experience. The rituals provided individuals with direct experience of immaterial reality. Veiled in secrecy, most rituals involved a carefully constructed environment and the use of ceremony to provide the individual with the catalyst needed to induce a transcendent experience. Frequently a sacrament, in the form of an entheogen, was ingested to aid in this process. The most well known rituals using entheogens are that of the Native Americans who ingest the peyote cactus plant. The plant contains the psychoactive substance known as mescaline. Peyote is ingested in a ‘quest to achieve other states of consciousness and to reach other planes of reality.’⁹¹

One ritual which is particularly significant to Western culture is the ancient Greek’s rites of Eleusis or the Eleusian Mysteries (Fig. 13).⁹²

⁹⁰ Moody, R. *Life After Life: the investigation of a phenomenon, survival of bodily death*. G. K. Hall, Boston, 1977, p. 214.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Performed annually for about 4000 years, the rite was open to ‘people of all classes, emperors and prostitutes, slaves and free men’ and women. The following is a description of the rites: *When at last they arrived at Eleusis, they danced far into the night beside the well where originally the mother had mourned for her lost Persephone. As they danced in honour of those two sacred goddesses and of their mysterious consort Dionysus, the god of inebriants, the stars and the moon and the daughters of the ocean would seem to join in their exaltation. Then they passed through the gates of the fortress walls, beyond which, shielded from profane view, was enacted the great Mystery of Eleusis. It was called a mystery because no one, under pain of death, could reveal what happened in the sanctuary.* (See Wasson, R. Hofmann, A. & C. Ruck. *The Road to Eluesis: unveiling the secret of the mysteries*. North Atlantic Books, California, United States, 2008, p. 45.)



Figure 13 *Eleusian Mysteries.*

It is widely known that the transcendent experience inducing sacrament *kykeon* was taken at Eleusis, however, debate remains as to the actual entheogen used. It is suggested that ergot, a psychotropic fungus was used. The rites of Eleusis were extremely influential, inspiring many of the philosophers, artists and writers of the time, including, Plato, Socrates, Cicero, Plutarch and Aristotle.

Currently, the focus of academic research surrounding entheogens is centred on the psychotherapeutic treatment of illnesses for which conventional drugs provide little relief. For example, they are currently promoting and funding research into the use of LSD and psilocybin⁹³ to treat the anxiety of those faced with a life threatening illness. However, it is widely acknowledged amongst academics conducting research into the possible uses of entheogens, that they have the potential to assist the spiritual and personal growth for all individuals. This was illustrated by a study conducted in 2008 by the *Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine* in the United States, entitled *Mystical-type experiences occasioned by psilocybin mediate the attribution of personal meaning and spiritual significance*.⁹⁴ The study reveals a direct

⁹³ Psilocybin is a psychoactive molecule present in the psilocybin mushrooms.

⁹⁴ Griffiths, R. Richards, W. Johnson, M. McCann, U. & R. Jesse. 'Mystical-type experiences occasioned by psilocybin mediate the attribution of personal meaning and spiritual significance 14 months later', *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, Vol. 22, No. 6,

correlation between psychoactive substances, mystical experience and personal meaning. Below is a description of the results:

*At the 14-month follow-up, 58 percent and 67 percent, respectively, of volunteers rated the psilocybin-occasioned experience as being among the five most personally meaningful and among the five most spiritually significant experiences of their lives; 64 percent indicated that the experience increased well-being or life satisfaction; 58 percent met criteria for having had a 'complete' mystical experience. When administered under supportive conditions, psilocybin occasioned experiences similar to spontaneously occurring mystical experiences that, at 14-month follow-up, were considered by volunteers to be among the most personally meaningful and spiritually significant of their lives.*⁹⁵

General interest in the use of entheogens has become increasingly prevalent in the West, manifesting in a number of ways. Below are two prominent examples of how Western individuals are seeking transformative experience through the entheogens.

‘The last decade of the 20th century witnessed the growth of non-traditional desires for religious experience ...’⁹⁶ amongst Western youth. During this decade, *rave culture* was established. Mainstream rave culture was largely based around electronic music and MDMA.⁹⁷ One subculture of rave culture specifically designed gatherings to induce transcendent experience. The gatherings utilise music, dance, art, ritual and entheogens to achieve trance states. ‘Participation in psychedelic dance parties can produce experiences with apparent similarities to those accessed in various ecstatic and shamanic religious traditions, especially those that utilise entheogens’.⁹⁸ The new millennium has witnessed an increase in popularity in parties which promote transcendent experience. Today a single event, such as, Europe’s *Boom*

621-632, <<http://jop.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/22/6/621>>, 2008 (accessed 17 February 2010).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ St. John, G. (ed). *Rave Culture and Religion*. Routledge, London, 2004, p. 19.

⁹⁷ 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine or Ecstasy.

⁹⁸ St. John, G. (ed). *Rave Culture and Religion*. Routledge, London, 2004, p. 125.

Festival (Fig. 14) can attract up to 30,000 people. It is widely accepted amongst the participants of these events that their ‘... ascension within youth subcultures is due to the religious nature of its experience’.⁹⁹



Figure 14 *Boom Festival*, Portugal 2008.

Many individuals, who seek the profound spiritual and healing experiences entheogens can facilitate, are travelling to places where the indigenous people have made their traditional ceremonies available to Westerners. In the rain forest areas of South America, indigenous people have been drinking a psychoactive beverage known as *Ayahuasca* for centuries. This ‘tea’ is used in both religious and medicinal contexts and contains the psychoactive agent N, N-dimethyl tryptamine or DMT, a naturally occurring chemical in the human brain.¹⁰⁰ Westerners are able to participate in the ceremonies and experience the effects of DMT, often with the guidance of a Shaman (Fig. 15).

⁹⁹ St. John, G. (ed). *Rave Culture and Religion*. Routledge, London, 2004, p. 65.

¹⁰⁰ Riba, J. Rodríguez-Fornells, A. Urbano, G. Morte, A. Antonijoan, R. Montero, M. Callaway, J. & M. Barbanoj., ‘Subjective effects and tolerability of the South American psychoactive beverage Ayahuasca in healthy volunteers’, *Springer-Verlag*, <http://brainvitge.org/papers/riba_psycho_2001.pdf>, 2000 (accessed 16 February 2010).



Figure 15 *Ayahuasca Retreat, Peru.*

In very recent years Australia has witnessed a merging of the academic and general interest in entheogens in the form of a conference. It brings together a wide range of people who are interested in the subject of psychoactive plants and chemicals. In 2010 the *Entheogenesis Australis* conference is to be held at the University of Melbourne.

The West seems to be undergoing a paradigm shift towards direct personal experience of the immaterial. For centuries many individuals in the West have been detached from the immaterial, however it appears that this element of our being is irrepressible.

A Deeper Perception

There is something formless yet complete
 That existed before heaven and earth.
 How still! How empty!
 Dependent on nothing, unchanging,
 All pervading, unfailing.
 One may think of it as the mother of all things under heaven.
 I do not know its name,
 But I call it *meaning*.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: an acausal connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 97.

The transformative experience is an archetype deeply imbedded in the biological structure of our beings. Whether the event is induced in a ritual setting or by an entheogen of some sort, be it a spontaneous transcendent experience or synchronicity, the revelations of a book, or the taking of a spirit photograph, it is generally agreed that the effect these experiences have is one which is predominantly positive.

Transformative experiences commonly change the individual's outlook on life. Often this change is profound, causing the experient to reassess many aspects of their life. Aspects that would have been considered of the utmost importance previously, such as a successful career or material wealth, can become somewhat insignificant. Frequently the experience will result in a change of purpose. This is illustrated by my own transcendent experience at the age of 20, where following the experience I gave up my Law degree and began art school:

Although I had no idea what I had just experienced, I understood it on an intuitive level and for many years I referred to it as my 'eternal moment.' The experience gave me an inner strength. I changed the direction of my life, I gave up studying Law and began my degree at art school.

Maxwell and Tschudin state that transcendent experiences add depth and extra dimension to the individual's life. Following the event individuals will often no longer fear of death. They are, on average, happier, more optimistic, more tolerant, more empathetic, more humble and more sensitive to the needs of others.¹⁰² Kenneth Ring describes the effects of a near-death experience, illustrating the positive effects of the transcendent experience:

The typical near-death survivor emerges from their experience with a heightened sense of appreciation for life, determined to live life to the fullest. They have a renewed sense of individual purpose in living... They feel themselves to be stronger, more self-confident and adjust more easily to the

¹⁰² Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 37.

vicissitudes of life. The things they value are love and service to others; material comforts are no longer so important. They become more compassionate toward others, more able to accept them unconditionally. They have achieved a sense of what is important in life and strive to live in accordance with their understanding of what matters.¹⁰³

Seeing the Invisible concludes its section on the purpose of the transcendent experience by stating that ‘the purpose does not lie in the outcome as a measurable goal, but more as a reminder of an original vision and in this strength constantly enhances life’.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the transformative experience helps to establish an understanding of the individuals place in the universe. The individual once again establishes themselves as an intricate part of nature, a part of an infinite whole. This knowledge gives the individual meaning. With this deepened understanding comes a new appreciation of existence, transforming the everyday into a vision of beauty. It is this beauty that artists have, for millennia, endeavoured to express in visual form.

¹⁰³ Ring, K. *Heading Toward Omega: in search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. W. Morrow, New York, 1984, p. 157.

¹⁰⁴ Maxwell, M. & V. Tschudin. *Seeing the Invisible: modern religious and other transcendent experiences*. London, New York: Arkana, 1990, p. 41.

Part II: Transformative Experience and Art

The artists aspiration toward making the invisible visible or imaging the spirit, has been a creative goal since antiquity.¹⁰⁵

Introduction

Many artists have been compelled to express the archetypal immaterial beauty revealed by transformative experience. It has been a preoccupation with humans which perhaps extends back to the birth of human consciousness. All of the world's great religions and systems of belief have utilised art to affirm and provide a visual expression to the viewpoint that underlie their convictions. Although these works of art address the subject of the immaterial from a specific religious or cultural context, if one considers the works carefully they depict a universal experience.

In devising a visual language for the expression of the transformative experience, artists often draw on the devices used by systems of belief. Of these devices; geometry, symmetry and perception are of considerable importance when exploring ideas of the immaterial. Additionally, artists utilise the viewpoints and philosophies attuned with the context of the time in which they exist. As a result, many contemporary artists advocate various aspects of current scientific and philosophical thought to validate their expression of the immaterial. In the following section I discuss art practises which contextualise my work. I examine both contemporary and historical artists who engage in a visual exploration of transformative experience and the immaterial aspects of reality associated with such events. Through these artists' works we encounter the immaterial, the spiritual and the invisible, engaging us in the vast mysteries of existence impenetrable to normal human perception.

¹⁰⁵ Young, L. 'Review: The Elemental Sublime', *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 65-71, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245727>>, 1997 (accessed 26 February 2009).

Art and the Invisible

Art would seem to be a characteristic of Homo sapiens; since prehistoric times, it has always appeared in close conjunction with our fundamental interrogations on the questions of who we are, where we come from and what will happen to us.¹⁰⁶

This was the premise for a major art exhibition at the *Centre Pompidou* in 2008 entitled *Traces du Sacré* (Fig. 16).

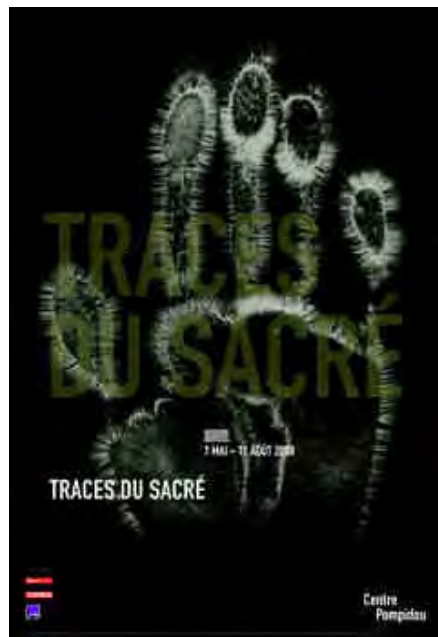


Figure 16 *Traces du Sacré*, Centre Pompidou, 2008.

The exhibition of approximately 350 works celebrated the spiritual in art and featured almost 200 artists, from Wassily Kandinsky to Bill Viola. ‘The exhibition investigated the way in which art continues to demonstrate, often in unexpected forms, a vision that goes beyond the ordinariness of things and how, in a completely secular world, it remains the secular outlet for an irrepressible need for spirituality’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ ‘Traces du Sacré’, *Centre Pompidou*, <<http://www.centrepompidou.fr>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Following the movement toward the alternative modes of thinking inspired by the 1990s, the new millennium has seen a considerable increase in artists who explore the immaterial aspects of human existence. Consequently, art prizes exploring the spiritual, such as, the Blake Prize in Australia, are becoming increasingly prestigious.

Angelica Mesiti won the 2009 Blake Prize with her video piece entitled *Rapture* (Fig.17). The slow motion video footage depicts individuals at a music concert who seem to be experiencing the ecstatic states similar to those reached through some religious practise.



Figure 17 Angelica Mesiti, *Rapture(silent anthem)*, 2009.

The European Cathedral: A Contemporary Installation Space

Over the last decade there has been an emphasis on installing art in venues outside of the traditional gallery context. This has come from, ‘a desire to integrate art with everyday life that entails a critical stance towards the elitism of institutionalised art’.¹⁰⁸ As a result churches and cathedrals throughout the West are being utilised as installation spaces for contemporary artists. As an installation space, the church provides artworks

¹⁰⁸ Coulter-Smith, G. *Deconstructing Installation Art: fine art and media art*, Casiad Publishing, London, <<http://www.installationart.net/index.html>>, 2006 (accessed 26 March 2010).

with an impact often difficult to obtain in the traditional setting of the white cube gallery.

Although many individuals no longer take part in institutionalised religion, the church space continues to hold significance for those same individuals. In his book *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, Bill Viola describes the Western individual's relationship to the Gothic church:

*To the European mind the reverberant characteristics of the interior of the Gothic cathedral are inextricably linked with a deep sense of the sacred and tend to evoke strong associations with both the internal private space of contemplation and the larger realm of the ineffable. ... Cathedrals, such as Chartres in France, embody concepts derived from the rediscovery of the works of the ancient Greeks, particularly those of Plato and Pythagoras, and their theories of the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm, expressed in the language of sacred number, proportion, and harmony, and that manifest themselves in the science of sound and music. These design concepts were not considered to be the work of man, or merely functions of architectural practice, but represented the divine underlying principles of the universe itself. By incorporating them into the body of the church it was intended to establish a harmonic reflection of their form here on earth.*¹⁰⁹

Much of this artwork installed in churches and cathedrals take the form of installation. Installation art came to the fore in the 1990s as a major movement in art.¹¹⁰ I refer to installation art in its most fundamental form, as an experience of art one can walk into, be surrounded by and immersed in. This form of art allows the viewer to immerse themselves in the environment created by the artist, thus increasing the level of engagement with the work and enhancing the experience for the viewer.

¹⁰⁹ Viola, B. *Reasons for knocking at an Empty H4ouse: writings 1973–1994*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1995, p. 154.

¹¹⁰ Coulter-Smith, G. *Deconstructing Installation Art: fine art and media art*, Casiad Publishing, London, <<http://www.installationart.net/index.html>>, 2006 (accessed 26 March 2010).

The churches and cathedrals have housed an array of magnificent examples of art throughout the centuries. As an installation space, the church establishes a contemporary place to specifically ‘explore the relationships between art and spirituality’.¹¹¹

Michael Cross’s work, entitled *Bridge* (Fig. 18), was installed in an old church in London. As the viewer stands at the edge of the flooded floor, a stepping stone rises to the surface. Once the viewer steps onto the first stone, the next stepping stone is triggered and rises to the surface, as the viewer steps on this one, the stone behind them sinks beneath the water. The viewer moves slowly through thirty stepping stones.



Figure 18 Michael Cross, *Bridge*, 2006.

The medieval church, *York Saint Mary's*, in Scotland has been transformed into a permanent exhibition space. Each year an artist is invited to create a site-specific installation within the church. In 2007 Keiko Mukaide's glass installation *Memory of Place* (Fig. 19) attracted more than 35,000 visitors to the site.

¹¹¹ 'Wallspace Gallery: a spiritual home for visual art', *Wallspace Gallery*, London, <<http://www.wallspace.org.uk/>>, (accessed 15 March 2009).

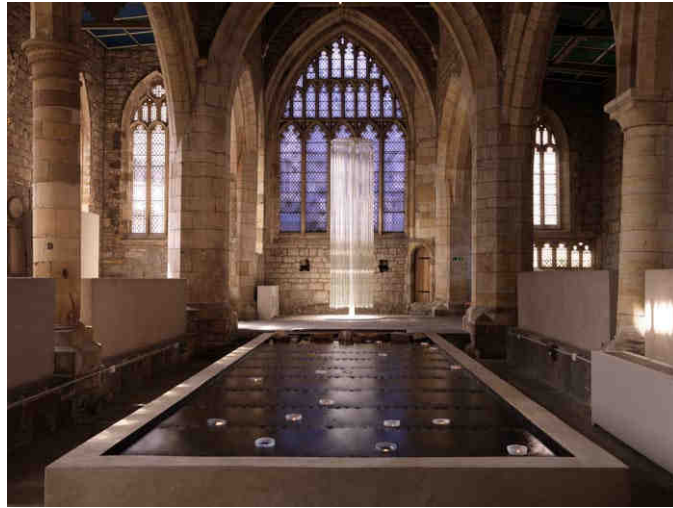


Figure 19 Keiko Mukaide, *Memory of Place*, 2007.

Bill Viola is perhaps the most well known artist who exhibits his work outside of the traditional gallery context.

Bill Viola and Transformative Experience

Bill Viola began experimenting with video as an art medium in the early 1970s, and is described as one of the pioneers of video art. Over the years he has become one of the most influential video artists of today, gaining recognition and respect across the globe.¹¹² Viola works in video installation utilising ‘image, sound and music to create projective narrative environments exploring universal human experiences ...’¹¹³ Much of his work is based on personal experience, he depicts a range of profound experiences, such as, birth, death and the nature of consciousness.¹¹⁴ He begins with one of these personal ‘timeless and eternally complex ideas, and translates it into a universal, visual symbol ...’¹¹⁵ Viola’s works have often dealt with matters of the spirit, however, ‘rather than a religio-specific construct, he creates a

¹¹² Youngblood, G. ‘The Source of the Images Is Within: the videotapes of Bill Viola’, *MoMA*, No. 45, pp. 2-3, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4381027>>, 1986 (accessed 26 February 2009).

¹¹³ ‘Whitney to present New York Premiere of Bill Viola’s Five Angels for the Millennium’, *Whitney Museum of American Art*, <<http://whitney.org>>, 2008 (accessed 22 March 2009).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Young, L. ‘Review: The Elemental Sublime’, *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 65-71, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245727>>, 1997 (accessed 26 February 2009).

contemporary image of ecstasy, a mini chapel for meditation, contemplation, devotion, or examination'.¹¹⁶

Published in 1995 Bill Viola's book entitled *Reasons for knocking at an empty house*, imparts an insight into his influences and source of inspiration. His work is informed by both Western and Eastern art, world religion, mysticism, poetry, philosophy, the natural world, science and mythology. The psychology of perception has played a significant role in his work, he has referred to his work as, 'allegories in the language of subjective perception'.¹¹⁷ His interest in perception and its relation to reality, extend to an interest in Sufism and Buddhism. Each of these schools of thought is concerned with the illusion of reality. Viola described his imagery as 'metaphors for the personal subjective world of perception, cognition, imagination, dreams and memory'.¹¹⁸

In a recent interview Bill Viola declares that 'part of our nature as human beings is a spiritual dimension, this is not simply the expression of religion, it is one of the properties or basic principles of human beings, the way birth, death and eating is ...'.¹¹⁹ Viola claims that Western society has mastered the material aspects of reality, while it has neglected the unknowable, ineffable part of our natures.¹²⁰ For him, 'art in general is about bringing forth what is in you in some metaphysical, spiritual dimension, bringing it into the world in some tangible, physical way that others can experience'.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Young, L. 'Review: The Elemental Sublime', *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 65-71, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245727>>, 1997 (accessed 26 February 2009).

¹¹⁷ Youngblood, G. 'The Source of the Images Is Within: the videotapes of Bill Viola', *MoMA*, No. 45, pp. 2-3, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4381027>>, 1986 (accessed 26 February 2009).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *Five Angels by Bill Viola: a film by Ralph Goertz*, Vimeo: Art Films, Institut für Kunstdokumentation und Szenografie, <<http://vimeo.com/groups/2673/videos/3914185>>, 2009 (accessed 26 March 2009).

¹²⁰ *Bill Viola Artists Talk: love/death: the Tristan project*, Channel Tate, <<http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/26708479001>>, 2006 (accessed 26 March 2009).

¹²¹ *Five Angels by Bill Viola: a film by Ralph Goertz*, Vimeo: Art Films, Institut für Kunstdokumentation und Szenografie, <<http://vimeo.com/groups/2673/videos/3914185>>, 2009 (accessed 26 March 2009).

Viola values experiences of transcendence highly. Keenly aware that our deep link with nature is often severed by living in contemporary society, Viola identifies nature as a means to transcend ourselves. He describes a transcendent experience in the desert, where he felt completely insignificant and at the same time felt himself expand out and connect with mountains hundreds of miles away.¹²²

Transformative experience is repeatedly represented in Viola's work. The most famous is *The Passing* (Fig. 20) where he presented a work which depicted his mother dying, a man suspended in water and the birth of a baby. He represents life as a delicate fragile thing suspended between birth and death.



Figure 20 Bill Viola, *The Passing*, 1991.

In *Bill Viola: The eye of the heart*, a documentary based on his life and work, he describes a near-death experience where he almost drowned when he was six years old.¹²³ He describes himself sinking to the bottom of a lake, where he saw the most beautiful world he had ever seen. There were shafts of blue-green light, plants moving in the current, small fish swimming around, he says it was like paradise. He remembers that he didn't think he was

¹²² *Bill Viola: The eye of the heart*, DVD, Arte, France, 2003.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

drowning and he knew he didn't want to come up. He experienced this absolutely beautiful scene without any fear and claims it was one of the most peaceful moments in his whole life. Evidence of this event is apparent in many of his works.

In *Five Angels for the Millennium* (Fig. 21), Viola set out to make a work based on his experience of his near drowning. However, as he states in an interview, that when his partner saw the work she said he had made a work about ascension rather than drowning, hence the work's title. He uses water as a prevailing symbol of the invisible plains or forces of our reality. The work explores the transition from life to death and death to life. His subject is suspended in an in-between state moving constantly between the two states of being, the material and the immaterial.

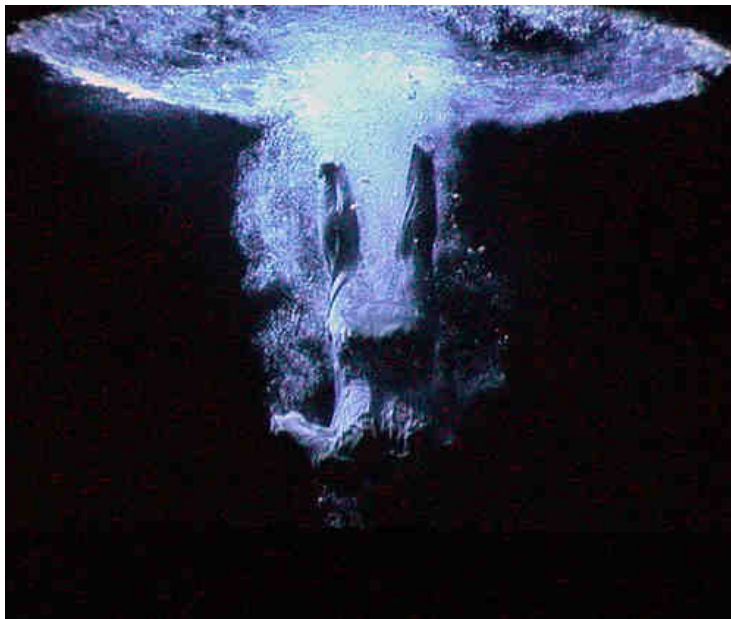


Figure 21 Bill Viola, *Departing Angel* from *Five Angels for the Millennium*, 2001.

In *Five Angels for the Millennium*, Bill Viola projects five video images of a clothed man jumping into water. Each projection shows the figure submerged, submerging or re-emerging from water. The slow motion footage depicts the figure slowly disappearing and reappearing at varying times from each sequence. A portion of the footage is played backwards and/or upside down, creating a disorienting feeling. The colours of each

video move from intense red (Fig. 22) to deep blue as the figures plunge and re-emerge from the water, each undergoing their own continual transformation between the material and immaterial. An audio track of a deep, resonating sound of water accompanies each projection, the sound is occasionally interspersed with the sound of bubbles. Each of the five angels has been given a name; *Departing Angel*, *Birth Angel*, *Fire Angel*, *Ascending Angel*, and *Creation Angel*.¹²⁴ Viola states that the images in this work are not of this world, they are only seen in dreams or memories or in the imagination.¹²⁵

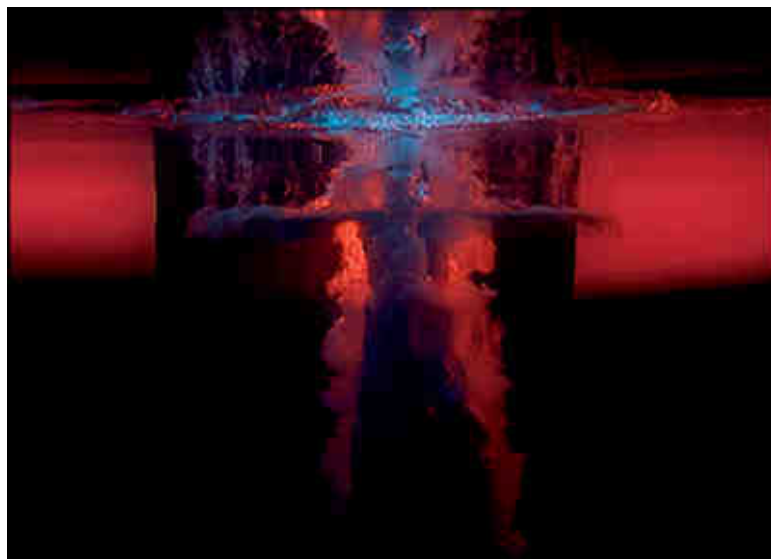


Figure 22 Bill Viola, *Fire Angel* from *Five Angels for the Millennium*, 2001.

The fall into Paradise (Fig. 23) forms a part of *Love/Death: The Tristan Project*, a group of works inspired by a French opera. The work is based on two lovers who form the central role of the story. The lovers realise they are not able to be together in life. They are so deeply in love, they decide they can only be together out of their bodies in an immaterial existence. In order to leave their bodies they must die, they drink poison together to achieve this end. Viola represents death as falling, and immaterial existence or paradise, is represented by water. The video begins with a small indistinguishable

¹²⁴ 'Whitney to present New York Premiere of Bill Viola's Five Angels for the Millennium', *Whitney Museum of American Art*, <<http://whitney.org>>, 2008 (accessed 22 March 2009).

¹²⁵ *Five Angels by Bill Viola: a film by Ralph Goertz*, Vimeo: Art Films, Institut für Kunstdokumentation und Szenografie, <<http://vimeo.com/groups/2673/videos/3914185>>, 2009 (accessed 26 March 2009).

point on a light background, all is silent. As this point grows larger, it becomes evident that the form is that of two human figures. It becomes apparent that they are moving towards the camera at a tremendous speed. Suddenly, there is an enormous crash as two figures plunge into water. At this point, the viewer realises that the camera was submerged beneath the water. The sound of the bodies crashing into the water is a sharp contrast to the silence experienced moments before. The effect is quite powerful and a little frightening. After the initial impact the figures begin to float. It is at this stage one realises there is a woman and a man. They are still, floating, suspended in paradise together for eternity. The slow motion image is peaceful, calm and very beautiful.

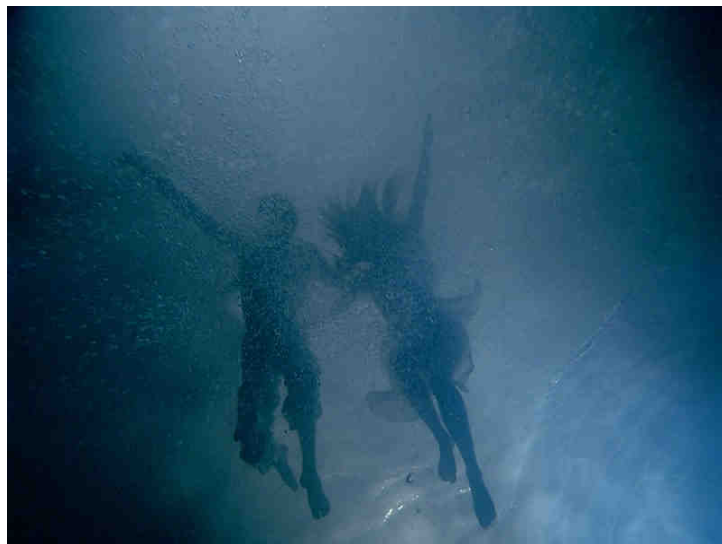


Figure 23 Bill Viola, *The Fall into paradise*, 2005.

Ocean Without a Shore (Fig. 24) was created for the Venice Biennale in 2007. The work was installed in the small Church of *San Gallo*, Venice. In his initial viewing of the space Viola took note of three large altars occupying the tiny church. He focused on the altars as the source of his inspiration. Viola viewed the altars as a place where the dead reside and connect with the living in the form of prayer. He states that the work expresses the 'notion of the dead coming back to the world temporarily'.¹²⁶ He mounted a high definition plasma screen on each of the three alters. Each

¹²⁶ *Venice Biennale: a new work by Bill Viola 2007*, Channel Tate, <<http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/26506128001>>, 2007 (accessed 26 March 2009).

video shows a succession of people approaching the viewer. Viola gives this description of the work in this interview from Tate Shorts:

The individuals emerge from a very dark obscure place, the image is black and white. They pass through an invisible threshold in the form of a wall of water, which is so clear and transparent you can't see it. When they step, seemingly, into this space, they become at that moment transformed into a high definition, highly detailed, full colour image. They exist in material reality only temporarily, returning to the immaterial back through the membrane between worlds made of water and recede into obscurity.¹²⁷



Figure 24 Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007.

Accompanying the image is a deep resonating ambient sound. As the individuals pass through the wall of water (Fig. 25), the sound of the water dominates the auditory senses becoming thunderously loud. Viola states that the work is about humanity and the fragility of the borderline between life and death. 'It is not a hard wall ... it is very fragile, very tenuous, you can cross it in an instant'.¹²⁸ He claims that the 'nature of our awareness of death is one of the things in any culture which makes human beings have that profound feeling of what we call the human condition'.¹²⁹ Viola states that

¹²⁷ *Venice Biennale: a new work by Bill Viola 2007*, Channel Tate, <<http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/26506128001>>, 2007 (accessed 26 March 2009).

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

each actor involved in the work, brought with them their own stories of loss and death. The resulting work is powerful, beautiful and inspiring.



Figure 25 Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007.

Bill Viola endeavours to make artworks which speak to the heart. He claims that artworks are a portal opening for the other world and that the true image of art is not visual. He says that art is a place where messages concerning humanities quest for perfection, can be communicated.

Geometry

It is a constant idea of mine, that behind the cotton wool [of daily reality] is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are a part of the work of Art.

Virginia Woolf.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Briggs, J. *Fractals: the patterns of chaos: discovering a new aesthetic of art, science, and nature*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1992, p. 179.

People often express ideas of transcendence and beauty in terms of geometry, which literally means ‘measure of the earth’.¹³¹ Often, artists depicting the immaterial will use geometry to symbolise intangible ideas (Fig. 26).

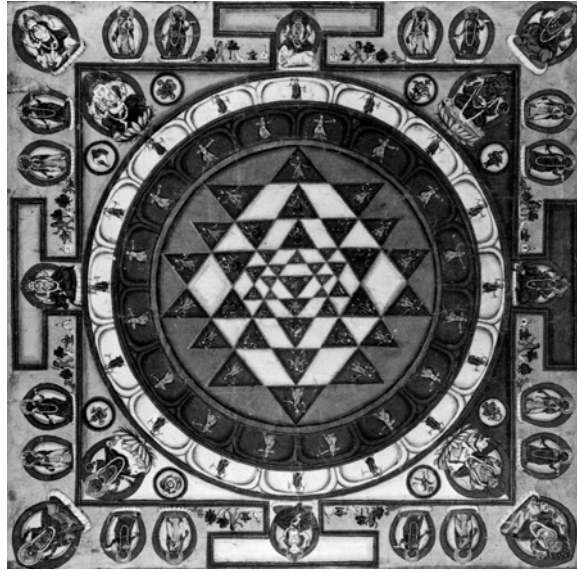


Figure 26 *Sri Yantra*, c1700.

Predating the ancient Greeks, geometry has been used in the West for thousands of years in the creation of architecture, rose windows, ceramic urns, church domes, art and music.¹³²

In 1967 Tons Brunes, a member of the Masons, an influential group which grew out of the guild of the stone masons of Europe, examined ancient geometry in great detail in his book, *The Secrets of Ancient Geometry*. He geometrically examines both art and architecture throughout Western history revealing the use of a secret ancient geometry passed down from the ancient Greeks and used in the design of artworks and buildings.

This form of ancient geometry is often referred to as *traditional or sacred geometry*. There has been controversy surrounding the use of the term sacred

¹³¹ Lawlor, R. *Sacred geometry: philosophy and practice*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1982, p. 6.

¹³² Capra, F. *The Tao of Physics: an exploration of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism*. Flamingo, London, 1992, p. 284.

geometry. The term simply refers to a geometry which is regarded as having symbolic value. It is a unique form of Euclidean geometry which, like nature, does not use measurement, only proportion. The tools of traditional geometry consist of no more than a compass and a straight edge. Traditional geometry has a deep connection with the fundamental design of the universe. In other words, it incorporates geometrical structures which form the basis of the underlying pattern of nature. William Blake expressed this idea in his image the *Ancient of Days* (Fig. 27), representing a god-like being as the grand architect of the universe.



Figure 27 William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*, 1794.

The most famous illustration demonstrating the significance of geometrical proportions to nature is Leonardo da Vinci's *Human Figure in a Circle and a Square*, illustrating *Virtruvius on Proportion*, 1485-90 (Fig. 28).

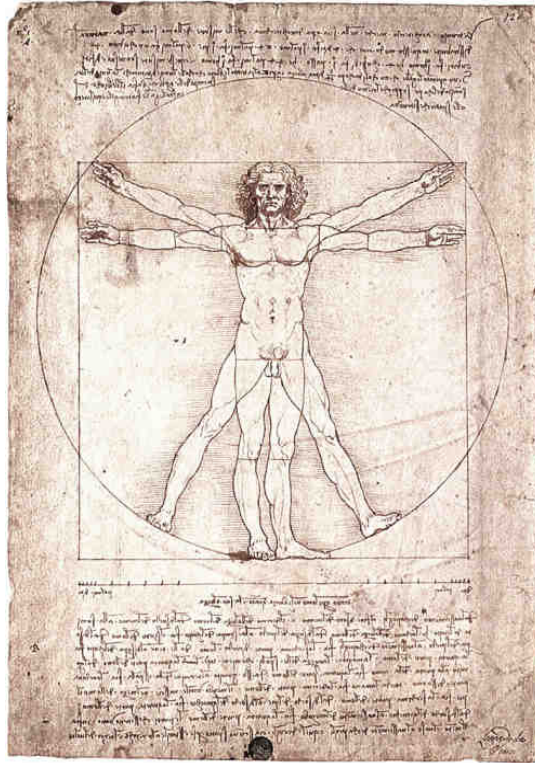


Figure 28 Leonardo da Vinci, *Human Figure in a Circle and a Square*, illustrating Vitruvius on Proportion, 1485–90.

The concept portrayed in this image ‘seemed to contain some deep and fundamental truth and it haunted the imagination of architects and artists’.¹³³ Following the revelations of the divine proportions, architects and artists began to use them in their work. The architects of the time were on a quest to design the perfect Christian church, one which incorporated both Christian and humanist ideals.¹³⁴ Based on the most perfect geometrical figures, the circle and the square, Da Vinci designed several plans for the ideal Christian church (Fig. 29). Reflecting celestial harmony, the dome symbolised the universe.¹³⁵

¹³³ Honour, H. & J. Fleming. *World History of Art*. Laurence King, London, 2002, p. 484.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

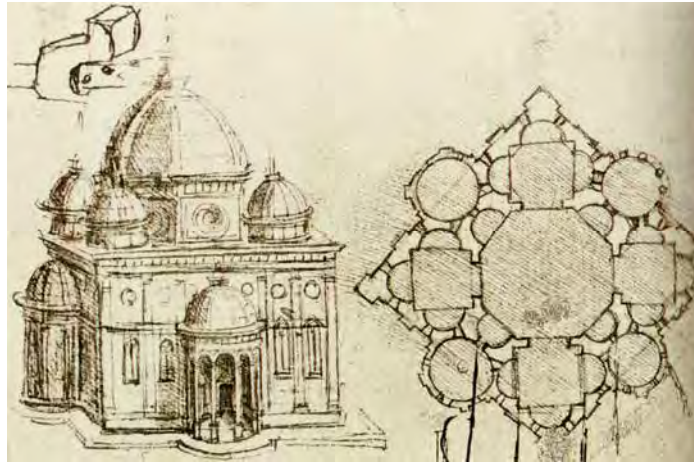


Figure 29 Leonardo Da Vinci, *sketches of plans for a church*.

One of the most fascinating aspects associated with *sacred geometry* is the famous ratio known as the *golden section*. This ratio is also referred to as, the golden mean, the golden ratio or the divine proportion. In mathematics it is represented by the Greek letter Phi Φ . It is an asymmetrical cut which creates infinite diversity within ordered symmetry perpetuated throughout the universe and interwoven into the fabric of our existence.¹³⁶ Ultimately, Phi illuminates a divine order of the universe and enhances the perception of harmony.¹³⁷ In other words, the proportion of the ratio is said to be partly responsible for our concept of beauty.

The golden section has been traced back to the ancient Egyptians. Some elementary geometry shows that the Great Pyramid was built in the golden proportions.¹³⁸ Contemporary philosopher, Scott Olsen, hypothesises that the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, alludes to the golden section in his writings, forming an important part of his philosophy.¹³⁹ He also proposes that Plato ‘was very careful with what he did and did not reveal, being under

¹³⁶ Fletcher, R. ‘Review of The Golden Section: nature’s greatest secret by Scott Olsen’, *Nexus Network Journal*, Vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 377-378, <<http://www.springerlink.com/content/q2u466u00x52k318/>>, 2007 (accessed 12 January 2010).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Livio, M. *The Golden Ratio: the story of phi, the extraordinary number of nature, art and beauty*. Review, London, 2002, p. 56.

¹³⁹ Olsen, S. ‘The Infinite Dyad and the Golden Section: uncovering Plato’s second principle’, *Nexus Network Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 97-110 <<http://www.springerlink.com/content/y25x8710708507j7/>>, 2002 (accessed 12 January 2010).

an apparently severe oath of secrecy'.¹⁴⁰ He claims that Plato provided his readers with subtle clues for them to uncover inner doctrines within his writings, stating that his writings are abundant with 'problems, puzzles, anomalies, apparent contradictions or incomplete results'.¹⁴¹

In the 15th century a fascination with geometrical problems was quite common amongst artists. For artist Piero della Francesca 'numbers also had a religious, quasi-mystical significance'.¹⁴² He was preoccupied with the golden section, believing it 'provided a key to the harmony of the heavens'.¹⁴³ He attempts to create divine order beneath the visual surface in his paintings by using a geometrical basis, this is evident even in his early works like the *Baptism of Christ* (Fig. 30).¹⁴⁴



Figure 30 Piero della Francesca, *Baptism of Christ*, c1445.

Later in the Renaissance a number of books were written in which the golden section was examined, the most famous *De Divina Proportione* was

¹⁴⁰ Olsen, S. 'The Infinite Dyad and the Golden Section: uncovering Plato's second principle', *Nexus Network Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 97-110
<<http://www.springerlink.com/content/y25x8710708507j7/>>, 2002 (accessed 12 January 2010).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Honour, H. & J. Fleming. *World History of Art*. Laurence King, London, 2002, p. 451.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 452.

written in 1509 by Luca Pacioli and illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci. The book outlined a code of human proportions referred to as the divine proportions.

The artists fascination with the golden section has carried through to contemporary art. One of the most famous modern works incorporating the golden section is Salvador Dali's *The sacrament of the Last Supper* (Fig. 31). The painting is laid out according to the golden section.



Figure 31 Salvador Dali, *The sacrament of the Last Supper*, 1955.

‘The announcement that God was dead by Nietzsche at the end of the 19th century, the beginnings of psychoanalysis, advances in physics and Marxism, all led to a rethinking of the human being’s place in the universe...’¹⁴⁵ Far from halting the exploration of issues concerning the immaterial, artists utilised these new ideas and expanded their ideas of immaterial reality. In his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* Kandinsky creates his own visual language from symmetry and geometry and produces abstract works representing spiritual exploration.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ ‘Traces du Sacré’, *Centre Pompidou*, <<http://www.centrepompidou.fr>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

¹⁴⁶ McWhinnie, H. ‘A Review of the Use of Symmetry, the golden section and dynamic Symmetry in contemporary art’, *Leonardo* 19, No. 3, pp. 241–245, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1578244>, 1986 (accessed 12 January 2010).

Between 1920 and 1940 Jay Hambidge's ideas of *dynamic symmetry* were very popular in art education. He developed a set of rectangles with harmonic proportions of which the golden section played the most important part.¹⁴⁷ Rothko applied the golden section to his entire colour-field works as a basic design motif (Fig. 32).¹⁴⁸ He used the 'Hambidge principles to give an artistic structure, a memory or organisation, and philosophical metaphors to his compositions'.¹⁴⁹ These works are considered deeply religious. In 1957 he was reported to say; 'The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them'.¹⁵⁰



Figure 32 Mark Rothko, *Orange and Yellow*, 1956.

It is evident that many artists have been inspired by the golden section. This fascination with the golden section is intimately tied to ideas of nature, the divine, the spiritual or immaterial aspects of reality.

¹⁴⁷ McWhinnie, H. 'A Review of the Use of Symmetry, the golden section and dynamic Symmetry in contemporary art', *Leonardo* 19, No. 3, pp. 241–245, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1578244>, 1986 (accessed 12 January 2010).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Honour, H. & J. Fleming. *World History of Art*. Laurence King, London, 2002, p. 847.

Symmetry is an idea humans through the ages have endeavoured to harness in order to create harmony, beauty, perfection and transcendence beyond the everyday.¹⁵¹ We often understand symmetry at its most basic level, that is, the bilateral symmetry of a beautiful human face or a butterfly, as used in Escher's unfinished drawing of butterflies (Fig. 33).

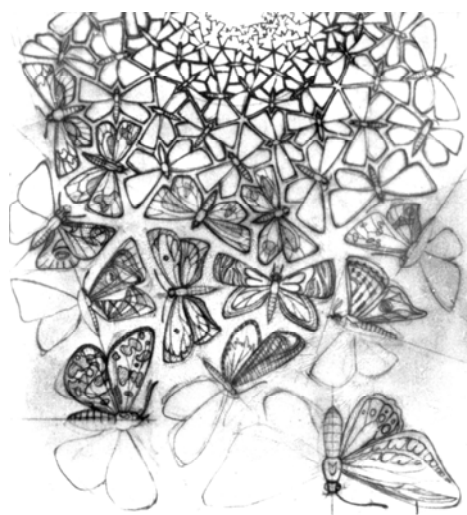


Figure 33 M.C. Escher, *Butterflies*, 1950.

Symmetry generally means well proportioned or well balanced. One of the great Greek sculptors of the classical period, Polykleitos claimed that, 'beauty is bound up with symmetry'.¹⁵² It is a special kind of transformation, a way to move an object, if the object looks the same after being transformed, then the transformation concerned is 'symmetry'.¹⁵³ These transformations include arrays, reflections and rotations.¹⁵⁴ Arrays are where an object is repeated forming patterns (Fig. 34).



Figure 34 *Vine scroll motif*, Tarxien Temple, Malta 3-2000BC.

¹⁵¹ Weyl, H. *Symmetry*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952, p. 5.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵³ Stewart, I. *Why beauty is truth: a history of symmetry*. Basic Books, New York, 2007, p. ix.

¹⁵⁴ Weyl, H. *Symmetry*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952, p. 5.

Reflections are bilateral or left and right symmetry and are often employed in the creation of architecture and art, as illustrated by William Blake's, *Thou Wast Perfect till Iniquity was Found in Thee*, (Fig. 35).¹⁵⁵



Figure 35 William Blake, *Satan in his Original Glory: Thou Wast Perfect till Iniquity was Found in Thee*, 1805.

Rotational symmetry is where a shape or object looks the same when it is rotated. Pythagoreans considered a circle to be the most perfect of geometrical figures due to its complete rotational symmetry.¹⁵⁶ Aristotle ascribed the spherical shape to celestial bodies because any other would detract from heavenly perfection.¹⁵⁷

Artists throughout history have used the circle as a symbol of transcendence. Over the last century, the West has become very familiar with the Eastern use of the circle, such as the Taoist Yin-Yang, the Buddhist mandala, mantras (Fig. 36) and images of the chakras.

¹⁵⁵ Stewart, I. *Why beauty is truth: a history of symmetry*. Basic Books, New York, 2007, p. ix.

¹⁵⁶ Weyl, H. *Symmetry*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

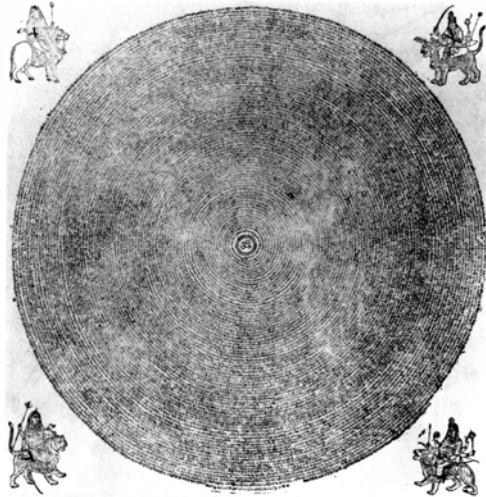


Figure 36 Ajit Mookerjee, *Vibrational image of the sound, Om.*

The circle has been recurrently used in Western culture in Christian iconography. Most notably it has been ascribed to halos or as in this image (Fig. 37), an illustration for Dante's *Purgatorio and Paradiso*, a symbol or depiction of ascension.



Figure 37 Gustave Dore, *Purgatorio and Paradiso Canto 31.*

The spiral is a symmetrical geometrical form widely used amongst artists. The pattern is an archetypal symbol for the acquirement of self knowledge.

In Bruce Nauman's work, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* (Window or Wall Sign) (Fig. 38), he makes direct reference to the metaphysical by the use of text. The neon sign was originally displayed in the window of a shop the artist was using as a studio at the time. The work blended in with the busy environment, competing with the myriad of neon signs in the same street. His intention was for the viewer to see the sign and subconsciously register it, and for those who wanted to contemplate his statement, to stop and consider it.

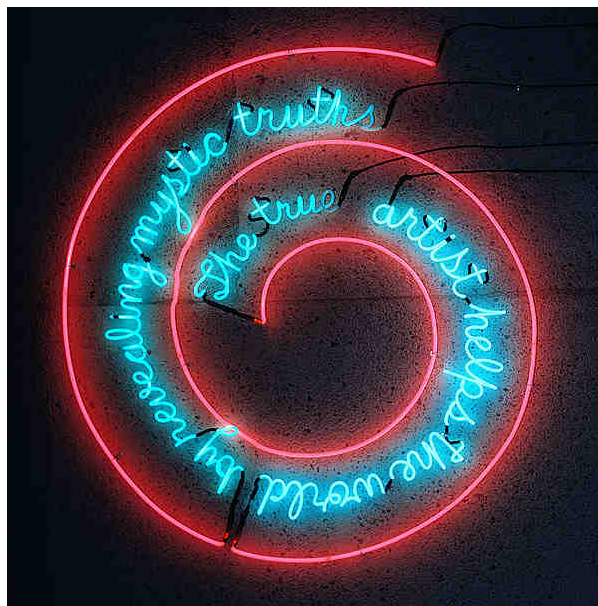


Figure 38 Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967.

The spiral also featured prominently in non-objective cinema. Using symmetrical geometrical figures, artists created beautiful semi-abstract moving images.

The history of non-objective experimental cinema stretches back to the films of the surrealist or dada movements. Marcel Duchamp used geometrical pattern in his 1926 film *Anemic Cinema*. The spinning animations are intercepted by French puns.

In the 1950s and 60s a group of experimental film makers created works which were referred to as non-objective cinema with spiritual or mystical themes. Inspired by Eastern mysticism and the psychedelic aspects prevalent

in the 1960s, they worked with abstract forms incorporating pattern and geometry to produce some beautiful works of art. They used a variety of techniques; traditional animation, video feedback and early computer graphics. These experimental artists were at the forefront of their field and their work is often described as *visual music*.

Jordan Belson is an American artist and experimental film maker. His work explores the fundamental questions of human existence, the spiritual nature of human beings and their place in the universe. Describing his work as cinematic paintings, Belson uses a combination of animation, traditional painting and real time, live manipulation of images. The audio for his films is frequently derived from composers, synchronising his ethereal imagery to works from artists like, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Franz Liszt.

Influenced by artists such as Kandinsky, Belson uses geometric figures to represent the invisible, internal aspects of reality which cannot be seen with the human eye. He utilises symmetry, geometric structures and colour to evoke 'sacred celestial experiences'.¹⁵⁸ The donut shaped double circle for him represents the human soul.¹⁵⁹ The celestial disc is a prominent component of all his works.

Jordan Belson created *Allures* (Fig. 39) in 1961. The work is considered an early masterpiece of non-objective cinema. Taking a year and a half to complete, the seven minute piece takes the viewer on a journey through the transcendental space of our universe. The journey reflects both the outer and inner realities of existence, or in other words, the material and immaterial.

¹⁵⁸ Moritz, W. 'Jordan Belson: Biography', *Centre for Visual Music*, <<http://www.centreforvisualmusic.org>>, 1996 (accessed March 25 2009).

¹⁵⁹ Tan, Y. 'The Unknown Art of Jordan Belson', *Animation Journal*, Spring 1999, University of Oregon, <<http://www.uoregon.edu>>, 1999 (accessed 19 November 2008).

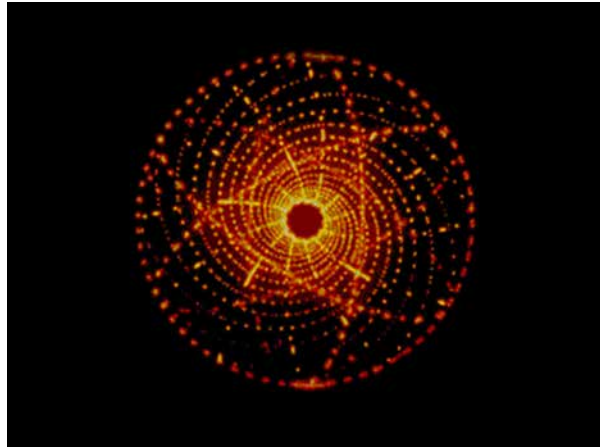


Figure 39 Jordan Belson, *Allures*, 1961.

Allures is an ethereal work derived from images in ‘a spectacular sequence of moving figures and points, a film which reaches out to the cosmic and the spiritual, where the spatial dimension becomes transcendental’.¹⁶⁰ Inspired by the cosmos, the imagery is made up of molecular type structures which oscillate and spin through space (Fig. 40). The unique profound images are intuitive, poetic and sublime. The viewer experiences order, harmony and an exquisite beauty.

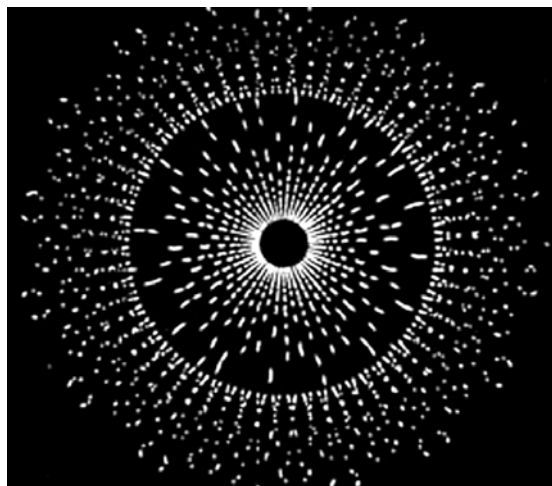


Figure 40 Jordan Belson, *Allures*, 1961.

Geometrical form is not restricted to spatial objects. The concept can also be applied to acoustic or musical properties to create harmony.¹⁶¹ Sound can be

¹⁶⁰ Moritz, W. ‘Jordan Belson: Biography’, *Centre for Visual Music*, <<http://www.centreforvisualmusic.org>>, 1996 (accessed March 25 2009).

¹⁶¹ Weyl, H. *Symmetry*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952, p. 3.

represented visually through vibrating liquid or small particles, such as sand, this is referred to as cymatics.

In his work *Ondulation* (Fig. 41), Thomas McIntosh creates pattern by using cymatics. The work evokes a meditative, entrancing and mesmerizing installation composed of water, light and sound. *Ondulation* literally means ‘wavelike movement’.¹⁶²

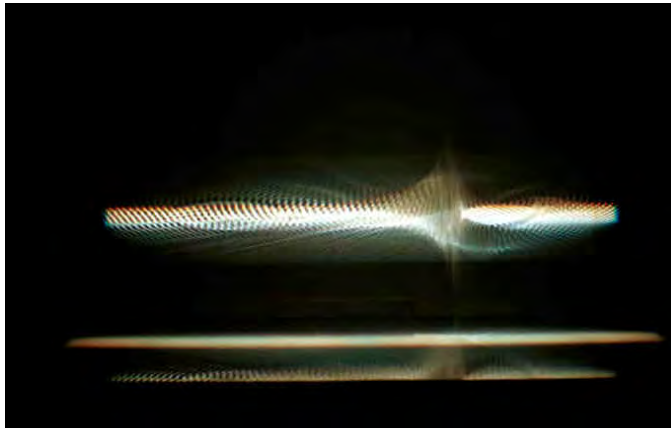


Figure 41 Thomas McIntosh, *Ondulation*, 2002.

Ondulation was installed in *The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal* in 2005. A two ton basin was filled with water and placed in a semi-darkened gallery space. The enormous basin occupying most of the space. Light is projected towards the water at an angle, creating a type of *liquid mirror*, which reflects the light up onto a projection screen. Underneath the basin are speakers. The sound emanating from the speakers causes the water to vibrate in sympathy/resonate. *Ondulation* begins simply with a single note that produces the first wave, and gradually becomes more and more complex. The patterns transform as the sound changes creating mesmerising patterns on the projection screen beside the basin. The work is presented as a *temporal sculpture*, a construction of water, sound and light, which evolves as a composition in time, forming a three-dimensional expression of the

¹⁶² Altena, A. ‘Growing Networks: art projects by Thomas McIntosh and Roman Kirschner’, <<http://www.v2.nl/archive/articles/McIntosh-Kirschner.pdf>>, 2004 (accessed 10 April 2009).

musical composition.¹⁶³ The work has the effect of synaesthesia, where the senses of auditory and visual perception alternate, in other words, the viewer feels they are seeing the sound and hearing the image. The invisible sound, is rendered visible in a liquid medium creating a work described as, 'captivating, hypnotic and meditative'.¹⁶⁴

Art and Nature

Following the Enlightenment, artists who continued to address metaphysical questions surrounding the human condition, sought new, personal ways to express spiritual transcendence without the use of traditional Christian iconography.¹⁶⁵ In the 18th and 19th centuries the writers and painters of the Romantic period expressed ideas of the spiritual through nature as an experience of the sublime.

Contemporary installation the artist, Olafur Eliasson, creates installation works which reconnect the viewer with nature and the sublime. The Danish artist explores ideas concerning nature, perception and art as a meditation or experience. *The weather project* (Fig. 42) was installed in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London. The installation consisted of a giant semi-circular form made of hundreds of mono-frequency lamps. These lamps are generally used in street lighting and 'emit light at such a narrow frequency that colours other than yellow and black are invisible, thus transforming the visual field around the *sun* into a vast duotone landscape'.¹⁶⁶ The space was filled with a fine mist which 'accumulated into faint, cloud-like formations,

¹⁶³ 'Ondulation', *Ondulation*, <<http://www.ondulation.net>>, 2009 (accessed 16 October 2009).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Stoker, W. 'The Rothko Chapel paintings and the urgency of the transcendent experience', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, No. 64, pp. 89–102, <<http://dare.uvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/13003/1/fulltext.pdf>>, 2008 (accessed 6 October 2009)

¹⁶⁶ 'The Unilever Series: The Weather Project', *Tate Modern*, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/eliasson/>>, 2008 (accessed 19 November 2008).

before dissipating across the space'.¹⁶⁷ The ceiling of the Turbine Hall was replaced by mirrors, reflecting the space below. The half circle repeated in the mirror overhead produced a full circular sphere radiating into the space like the sun.

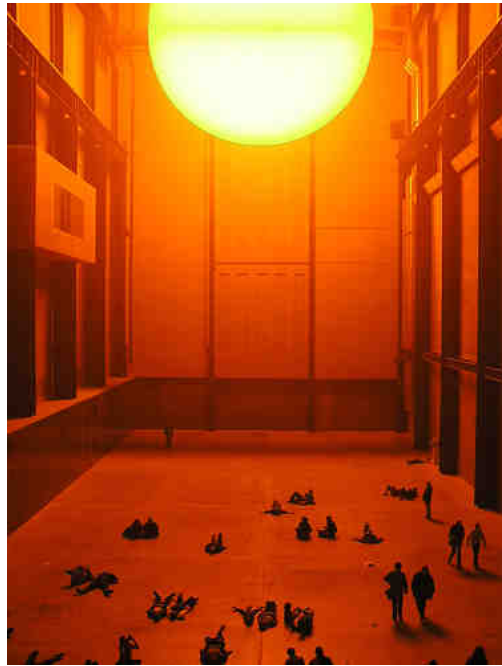


Figure 42 Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2004.

Eliasson views the weather as one of the fundamental elements of pure nature that can still be encountered and experienced in the urban environment. We often filter out such natural beauty, taking it for granted in our everyday experience of reality.¹⁶⁸ The sun taken out of its original context and recreated artificially in the gallery, forces the viewers to focus on its magnificent presence. Visitors to the Tate Modern were awed by the immense artificial sun and the work inspired them to act in a manner not conventional to the gallery space. Many visitors chose to lie down on the floor of the gallery in the warm glow of the artificial sun, despite the fact the work does not actually emit any heat. Once on the floor some viewers, seeing themselves in the mirrored ceiling formed their bodies into patterns in a playful interaction with the work. Viewers described their contact with the

¹⁶⁷ 'The Unilever Series: The Weather Project', *Tate Modern*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/eliasson/>, 2008 (accessed 19 November 2008).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

work as a spiritual experience, reconnecting them with nature. The installation was a huge success. According to the curator, Susan May, it may have been partly due to the miserable London winter outside.¹⁶⁹

Perception and the invisible

The psychology of perception is a powerful device to explore the invisible aspects of reality. Research into human perception reveals that what we perceive as reality is at least partially created by our own mind. The findings of psychology compliment the significant role human perception plays in the sub-atomic world. Often artists will use optical illusions to highlight the limits of human perception.

David Johnson's work expresses ideas which arise through his own contemplation of reality. He embraces the idea that the individual creates their own reality through the way they perceive their existence of the everyday. Through his work, Johnson develops a view of reality which satisfies the personal need in him for existential meaning, creating 'art which doesn't make meanings so much as shape an autonomous space for them to inhabit'.¹⁷⁰

Johnson uses found objects and still projections, merging the two elements to create optical illusions. The objects represent the visible, material aspects of reality, while the projections of light represent the immaterial and the invisible. This results in illusionary reflective works, exploring the ambiguous relationship between mind and matter, the real and the imagined, being and non-being, light and darkness.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ 'The Unilever Series: The Weather Project', *Tate Modern*, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/eliasson/>>, 2008 (accessed 19 November 2008).

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, D. 'Art as Concrete Metaphysics', *Imaginary Light: David Johnson*, <<http://david-johnson.co.uk/intro.html>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

In *Facing the Dark* (Fig. 43) a window is hung on a bare brick wall. At first glance the viewer assumes there is light emanating from the window illuminating the floor. The viewer realises that what they are looking at is impossible due to the solid brick wall visible through the glassless window panes. A slide is projected onto the floor and precisely into the framework of the window. The illusion 'creates an imagined light in the darkness'.¹⁷² The work endeavours to embody the basic condition of human existence, the desire to exist in a reality which is both physical and non-physical.



Figure 43 David Johnson, *Facing the Dark*, 2000.

Imaginary landscape no.2 (Fig. 44) is created from a wardrobe and a beam of light emanating from the open door onto the wall and floor. On closer inspection, the viewer realises the wardrobe is dark inside, and the light comes from an entirely different source.

¹⁷² Johnson, D. 'Art as Concrete Metaphysics', *Imaginary Light: David Johnson*, <<http://david-johnson.co.uk/intro.html>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

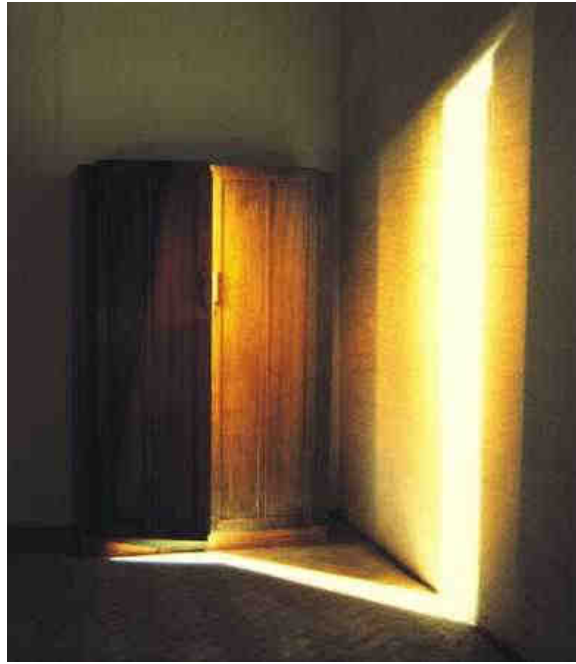


Figure 44 David Johnson, *Imaginary Landscape no.2*, 1997.

The carefully constructed illusion creates an atmosphere of the mystical, suspending the viewer between two realities, the real and the imagined. The tension created by this suspension between the real and imagined evokes the notion of immaterial orders of reality unperceivable to human perception.

An Invisible Presence

The next group of artists use varying techniques to evoke an invisible presence within their photographs.

Hiroshi Sugimoto is a highly regarded photographic artist who has been working since the 1970s. He creates meditative, large format, black and white photographic work. Sugimoto uses subtle techniques that add presence and atmosphere to his images, captivating the viewer's imagination.

In his series of *Seascapes*, Sugimoto photographs the elegantly simple line of the horizon where the sky meets the sea. The images exude presence and ambience, created by simple photographic techniques and point of view. In *Bass Straight, Table Cape* 1997 (Fig. 45), the slight movement of the camera

caused by a long exposure, creates a softening ethereal effect, suggesting the unknown.



Figure 45 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Bass Straight, Table Cape*, 1997.

Sugimoto speaks of *Seascapes* in metaphysical terms. For him the meeting of sky and sea, of water and air, raise questions of the origins of existence.¹⁷³ He states that ‘the beginnings of life are shrouded in myth ... and that ‘living phenomena spontaneously generated from water and air in the presence of light, could just as easily suggest random coincidence as a Deity ...’¹⁷⁴ He describes the scene of water and air right there before us in the sea as *mystery of mysteries*.¹⁷⁵ He concludes his passage on *Seascapes* by saying, ‘Every time I view the sea, I feel a calming sense of security, as if visiting my ancestral home; I embark on a voyage of seeing’.¹⁷⁶

In his series of *theatres*, Hiroshi Sugimoto took long exposures of cinemas that lasted for the entire duration of a film (Fig. 46). The entire film is compressed into a single image of a white screen. Time is compressed; the narrative and all the illuminations contained within the film are expressed as pure light. The narrative has been a dominant means to pass knowledge from

¹⁷³ Sugimoto, H. ‘Seascapes’, & ‘Theatres’, *Hiroshi Sugimoto*, <<http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/>>, 2009 (accessed 15 March 2009).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

one set of people to the next throughout human history. Knowledge is often expressed or represented as light. Sugimoto reduces the narrative to its essential form – light. The images of the theatres with their white light of knowledge, and their dimly lit interiors, create a sense of presence, an atmosphere of the other not visible in the photograph, but felt by the viewer.



Figure 46 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Paramount, Oakland*, 1994.

Nina Fischer and Maroan El Sani are German artists who have collaborated since 1993. In their work entitled *Aura Research* (Fig. 47) they juxtapose two images. The first image is a standard documentary style colour photograph of a room or a building. Displayed with each of these images is a second image which is quite different. The second photograph is a colourful abstract image made up of light and organic looking, perhaps molecular structures.

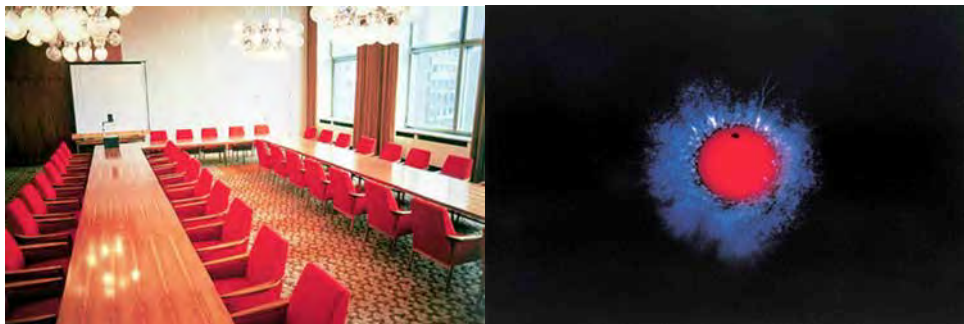


Figure 47 Nina Fischer and Maroan El Sani, *Aura Research*, 1994–2005.

Both images represent the same space. The artists claim the second image to be a photographic representation of the invisible aura of the space in the conventional photograph beside it. The spaces themselves are said to hold some significance, they are places where something of consequence has occurred, some highly emotional or eventful incident has taken place, perhaps, the artists suggest, leaving behind invisible traces of the event. The *aura* image is labelled as a *Kirlian* photograph. *Kirlian* photography is a technology after the Russian scientist who developed the method in 1939. It is said to be a technology in which the electronic magnetic waves of an organism are directly transferred onto the picture.¹⁷⁷ In other words, the abstract image is a representation of the energy invisible in the conventional photograph. Whether the *kirlian* image is a true representation of the invisible aura of the place or not, is not important, the work provokes a contemplation of what cannot be seen. The second image adds an invisible presence to the first, creating its own aura. In knowing what the second image represents it becomes impossible to look at the first as merely a photograph; it is imbued with presence.

Conclusion

The history of artists who explore the invisible as experienced through the transformative is an extensive one. I see the contemporary artists discussed in this section as contributing to the current shift in awareness of the immaterial. Intricately intertwined with the idea of the invisible, is humanity's connection to nature, a dialogue which has been partly fostered by the findings of modern physics. A dialogue between the immaterial, art and nature has been sparked in recent decades. I seek to contribute to this dialogue as I explore the concepts surrounding the transformative experience through my work.

¹⁷⁷ Shikata, Y. 'Do You Believe in the Technology of Believing?', *Art Watch Index*, Tokyo, Japan, <http://www.fischerelsani.net/texts/aura_text.html>, 1996 (accessed 20 August 2009).

Part III: Seeing Beauty: a personal exploration of transformative experience

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.¹⁷⁸

At the core of my transformative experiences is beauty. For me this is a singular, ancient beauty elegantly and intricately interwoven into the structure of my reality and deeply imbedded within my being. Inspired by the harmony and pattern of the transcendent, the charm of synchronicity, the revelations of quantum physics and the love beyond death of spirit photography is my final body of work. My final submission consists of seven photographic and video installation works. This section outlines how my investigation was pursued, it aims to reveal my journey of visual exploration into transformative experience.

Port Arthur and the Spirit Photograph

In 2002 I returned to Tasmania on holiday and visited the Port Arthur Historic Site, as I was aware that Port Arthur was a unique place for numerous instances of spirit photography. The site has a long reputation of encounters with the inexplicable. ‘Ghost tours’ of the site began in the mid nineteen-eighties, around the time it became a tourist attraction. Following this, spirit photographs, accompanied by letters began to be sent back to the site from various visitors. The administrators of the Port Arthur Historic Site store the photographs and reply to the letters and emails.

The number of spirit photographs taken by visitors to the Port Arthur Historic Site is quite significant. The photographs were ideal for investigation as they are generally taken by accident and by amateur

¹⁷⁸ From ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, by John Keats, 1819–1820. Leonard, J. (ed). *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 209.

photographers, meaning there was a reduced possibility of fraud and manipulation. The photographs are a mixture of simulacrum, photographic artefacts, and some very good examples of orbs, vortices and ectoplasmic vapour. The letters and emails accompanying the photographs were intriguing. Most often, the writer was seeking confirmation that the photograph they had taken was a genuine spirit photograph. Additionally, the tone of the letters revealed a search for confirmation of something beyond the proof of the existence of spirits, they were seeking something more meaningful and profoundly personal.

On my visit in 2002 I asked to see the photographs and this was my experience:

I asked the person at the front counter about the 'spirit photographs' and briefly told him about my work. He brought out a photo album full of photographs that people had sent back. Some contained obvious photographic artefacts, while others contained unexplainable anomalies. He drew my attention to one particular photograph of the memorial for the Port Arthur massacre.¹⁷⁹ In the photograph there were bright points of light all over and above the memorial, the lights were of a kind and quality I had never witnessed before. He went on to explain that there had been a massacre there a few years ago. He was visibly excited and enthusiastic about the photograph and said that he had counted each point of light and had found 35, one for each person who died in the massacre. Although I had no idea at the time, I later found out that he had been on the site at the time of the massacre and had three people die in his arms. This photograph held a great deal of meaning for him and from his attitude the photograph seemed to be part of his personal healing.

I felt ambivalent about including this experience involving the massacre in my investigation as, like all Tasmanians, the event had affected me profoundly. However, the unique photograph and the story told with it had captivated me. I found the individual's search for existential meaning in a

¹⁷⁹ On the 28th April 1996 a lone gunman killed 35 people and injured 21 at the Port Arthur Historic Site before being apprehended by the police.

spirit photograph remarkable. I was fascinated that a photograph could have such an influence over someone in our society, so much so that it leads to healing and resolution. This quite wonderful photograph was the starting point of my current investigation. I must point out here that I am unable to include this photograph in my exegesis as the owner of the photograph does not want any attention drawn to it, due to the nature of the circumstances surrounding the image.

In an endeavour to fully understand my interest in the subject, I sought out individuals who were interested in and had experiences of spirit photography. I noticed that the experience caused a shift in an individual's view of reality. I listened to many stories of experiences in an attempt to discover the cause of this shift. I found it interesting that, although the concept of spirit photography is not entirely acceptable to contemporary Western society's version of reality, it does affect individuals. It changes them, provides them with comfort, hope, beauty and a sense of meaning in existence. I was initially fascinated as to why people were searching for existential meaning in spirit photographs. While spirit photography may remain an enigma, it alludes to a more universal experience. Ultimately, this was what I was looking for, something more universal, something more fundamental to human experience and existence. Thus I began my investigation into the spirit photograph's ability to alter an individual's view on reality.

Resonance

My first work *Resonance*, examines both the appearance of anomalies in photographs, and a frequently accompanying physical experience. While the anomalies are categorised as orbs, vortices and ectoplasmic vapour, the accompanying physical experiences can vary widely. For example, individuals have reported experiences such as the sensation that someone has rested a hand on their shoulder, to a very strong smell which is out of place for the environment in which they are located. The dual occurrence of

simultaneous events or synchronicity can often cause the individual to question whether their world is as grounded, tangible and static as we perceive it in our everyday experience. *Resonance* was the result of much investigation and experimentation at Port Arthur.

I knew that my interest in spirit photography did not lie in attempting to capture the phenomenon or prove the existence of spirits. My interest was in the profound affects the chance experience of taking a spirit photograph had on individuals. I found the meaning which the photographs held for individuals captivating. For some, it confirmed the existence of something beyond what they experienced in their everyday reality. This imbued their lives with a heightened sense of purpose and meaning. I found a certain beauty in this, a beauty which was at first difficult for me to quantify.

Initially, I wished to explore my ideas by interviewing individuals who had obtained Port Arthur spirit photographs. This process required ethics approval. It also meant that each person would have to be contacted by Port Arthur on my behalf and consent was required to include their photographs and letters in my research. The process of seeking ethics approval proved a long and arduous task and although I eventually received it, the task to contact individuals proved too arduous for the Port Arthur Historic Site staff and the interviews never eventuated. I decided to explore my ideas through my own research and personal experience.

I began my investigation by familiarising myself with the site. This involved gathering information, taking tours of the site, collecting photographs and finally, exploring the historical site through my camera.

I became familiar with the general history of the Port Arthur Historical Site. The site had a reputation of haunting long before the first spirit photographs were presented to staff members. I read a large number of ghost stories collected over the years about Port Arthur and watched a number of films,

including one entitled *The Ghosts of Port Arthur*¹⁸⁰, an historical film at the Tasmanian Archives.

The rich and varied history of Port Arthur provided me with a poignant place in which to begin my investigation. Originally this remote part of the world was inhabited only by the Tasmanian Aborigines. Following the invasion of white settlers, it became a penitentiary for convicts transported from England and Ireland. The site was chosen for its isolation, safe port and for its plentiful supply of trees for ship building. Following the penitentiary's closure, the site became a curiosity for visitors and many convicts stayed on as guides. Gradually the community inhabited the site, the asylum was converted into the town hall and for many years the local community owned and ran Port Arthur, primarily deriving their income from visitors. Its care was eventually handed over to the government's department of Parks and Wildlife in order to preserve the unique historical site. The Port Arthur Historic Site is now a major tourist destination with thousands of visitors every year.

I read Margaret Scott's book, *Port Arthur: A story of strength and courage*. Dr Scott was a former lecturer of mine at the University of Tasmania that I greatly admired. I trusted that her version of the Port Arthur massacre would be untainted with the sensationalism I had come to expect from most accounts of that day. The book dispelled a lot of the myth that had been built up over the years for me and revealed the great courage, strength and wisdom of the individuals involved during and following the massacre. After reading the book, I felt cleansed in a way, and was able to move forward into my research.

From my initial viewing of the spirit photographs I ascertained that a significant proportion of the photographs were taken on tours offered by the site. I noticed that many of the photographs containing anomalies were taken in and around the residential buildings dotted around. Additionally, it was

¹⁸⁰ 'Ghosts of Port Arthur'. *Port Arthur films*. VHS. Tasmanian Archives Office, Hobart, Tasmania, 2004.

also evident that some buildings were more prone to display anomalies in photographs than others.

I undertook several of these tours, including the ghost tour. During the ghost tour, participants walk around the site in the evening, with old lanterns as their only light, while tour operators recount stories of haunting particular to that area of the site. Some stories include previous tours where members encountered the same ghosts from the stories told by the tour operators. The tour concludes with a visit to the morgue where the physician of the time performed autopsies. The tour effectively creates a state of extreme tension in many of its participants.

While participating in the tours I assumed the role of tourist. This meant I took along family members and a digital snapshot camera. I took the characteristic snapshots of Port Arthur as any tourist would. During some of my visits in this capacity, my snapshots resulted in some very good examples of orbs taken in daylight. The exterior of the ruins of the old church appeared to be a prominent place for anomalies to show up in photographs. Subsequently, my own snapshots resulted in an excellent example of an orb next to my stepson's head (Fig. 48, 49).



Figure 48 Alyssa Simone, *These photographs were taken within seconds of each other. The first shows a prominent orb near Josh's head, the second is taken closer but shows the orb has gone, 2004.*

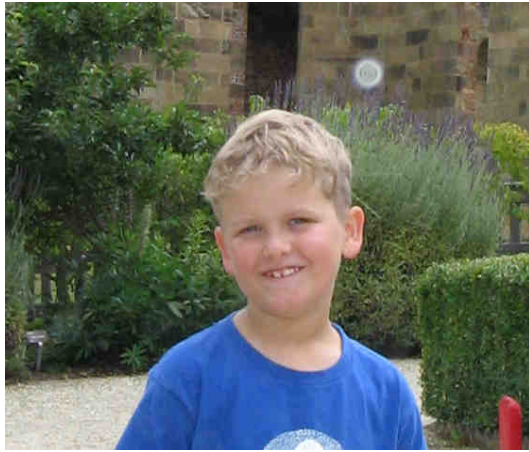


Figure 49 Alyssa Simone, *Close up of orb*, 2004.

My collection of photographs of the Port Arthur Historical Site included a large number of historical photographs. I found these historic images very different from the contemporary promotional photographs commonly associated with Port Arthur. As a photographer, I was well aware that Port Arthur is a highly photographed site. Annually, thousands of visitors record their visit, along with media images, promotional photographers and of course, other artists. The historic photographs gave me a different way of seeing the site.

Following this initial investigation, I explored the site through my camera. Initially, I documented Port Arthur in black and white. I experimented with several different films photographing the exteriors of the buildings (Fig. 50).



Figure 50 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

The majority of the resulting photographs were quite formal in their composition; they were often symmetrical (Fig. 51). Although, I was pleased with the result, the images lacked a particular quality I was seeking. I wished to somehow capture the resonance of Port Arthur, the feeling one has when walking around the site.



Figure 51 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

From examining the photographs I had taken, I realised I needed to move away from the conventional. I began to experiment. I began to take shots of unconventional views of places (Fig. 52).



Figure 52 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

Unsatisfied with the results I was obtaining in black and white, I changed to colour. My initial photographs of the exteriors of the buildings and the ruins around Port Arthur led me to experiment with the multitude of textural

surfaces of the dilapidated buildings inhabiting the site (Fig. 53). This was also partly inspired by the idea of simulacrum. During my investigation I had been shown many examples of images of faces seen in the surface of the buildings.



Figure 53 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

I went on to experiment with a plastic medium format camera known as a Holga. I chose this particular camera as the images it produces possess a different quality to a conventional camera. The images seem a little unreal, a step away from everyday reality. The Holga camera additionally inspired me to experiment with a number of different things; I overlapped images in some shots and took others from extreme angles (Fig. 54).



Figure 54 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

As a result of my experimentation, I found that photographing the site from unusual angles produced the result I was searching for. As it was essentially

the extreme angle of view I wanted, I changed to a medium format Hasselblad. The Hasselblad gave me more control over the outcome of the photographs. I chose an extreme wide angle lens to photograph the interiors of buildings and settled on a film for its dark intense colours. I took the camera off the tripod and photographed from the floor, giving the photographs an unusual point of view. This altered perspective gives the photograph a slightly uneasy feel (Fig. 55).



Figure 55 Alyssa Simone, *Resonance*, 2006.

Many spirit photographs are quite beautiful (Fig.56). Often the images contain the charm of the old buildings and additionally are accompanied by a white translucent ephemeral anomaly. I wanted this beauty to be translated into my own photographs.

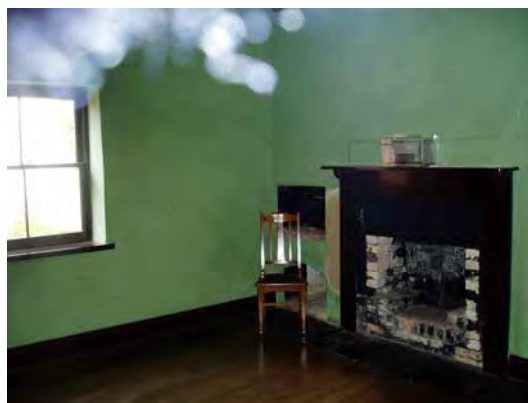


Figure 56 Alex Cairns, *Floating orbs*, c2004.

I chose to photograph spaces where spirit photographs had been taken. From these, I chose spaces which were empty or contained furniture which was no longer usable (Fig. 57). I found this obvious absence of life presented me with a certain unease. The spaces seemed to speak of something lost, untouchable and unknowable. The final images were far removed from the typical photographs of Port Arthur. Often the specific location of the historic site is far from obvious.

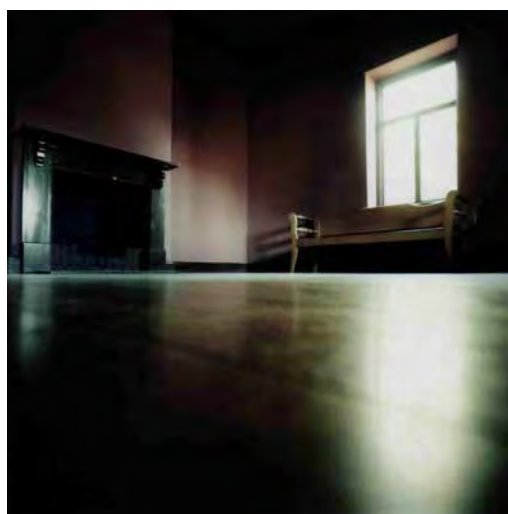
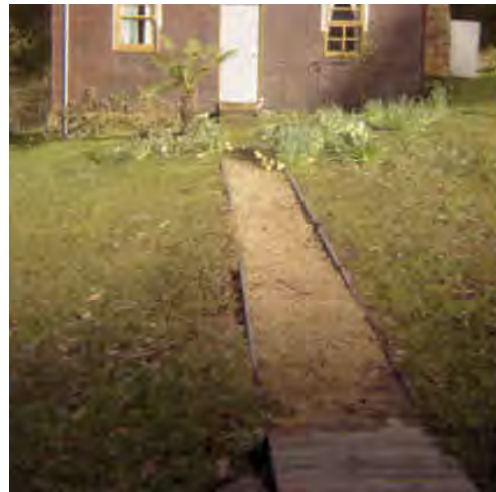


Figure 57 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2006.

I experimented with incorporating text into the photographs in many different forms (Fig. 58). The addition of text created a deepening of meaning within the photographs, a resonance of the anomalies contained in the spirit photographs.

Initially, I tried presenting the information in the manner of a scientist from a century or so ago. This was an allusion to the scientific way they once examined aspects of reality such as mythical beasts and so on. I visited the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in order to get an idea of how they catalogue items. Additionally, whilst I was there I looked at an old stereoscope in order to find inspiration for different ways of presenting my photographs. I presented the work in a way which was reminiscent of cataloguing, documentation and data collection of the scientific method.



SP 0002
 ITEM NAME: Photograph containing unexplained phenomena.
 MEDIUM: Colour photograph dye sublimation print.
 SIZE: 6" x 4" snapshot.
 FORMAT: Photograph was taken with an automatic digital camera. It was taken outdoors with an inbuilt flash.
 DATE: 9th February 2003.
 MAKER (Photographer): Andrew Henry.
 LOCATION: The photograph was taken of a house at Port Arthur.
 ORIGINAL: The original is kept in light sensitive and humidity controlled area 3P.
 DESCRIPTION: The photograph is of the front side of a house. The house is has not been occupied for several years and is not open to the public. Directly in front of the door hangs a mist like substance, it is dense, stagnant and unmoving.
 PHOTOGRAPHERS COMMENTS: "I only took the photograph because I had seen the exact same house in a dream three nights before I visited Port Arthur. I have never been to Port Arthur before."
 NOTES: The photograph is accompanied by a letter which describes the photographers thoughts about the house and what the photograph means.

Figure 58 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

Although the information I presented with the photographs is entirely fictional, the stories are derived from the many descriptions of direct personal experiences of spirit photography I had listened to over the years. From the conversations I had about spirit photography, I noticed that there were elements in the stories that were common to all. These included, a physical sensation of touch, smell or nausea, premonitory dreams, a haziness encumbering vision or dark figures scuttling away in the peripheral vision. I drew from these common elements to invent stories that accompany the photos. To begin with I incorporated the text directly into the image (Fig. 59).



Figure 59 Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2006.

In 2008 I had the opportunity to present this work in an exhibition curated by Dr Brigita Ozolins entitled *Parallel* (Fig. 60). For the exhibition I presented three photographs, each with a whispering voice emanating from it. The MP3 players and speakers used to produce the audio were hidden behind the photographs, making the source of the audio inconspicuous. The voice accompanying each photograph recounted an incident of photographing an anomaly and a strange physical experience associated with it.



Figure 60 Alyssa Simone, *Resonance*, installation view, 2008.

Standing back from the work, the audio from the three images intermingles, making the stories unintelligible. From this position the viewer might make sense of the odd word, but if they wished to hear each story whispering from the photograph they were required to move quite close to each image. Each photograph whispers its story implying secrecy and its reluctance to relate its experience to other people.



Figure 61 Alyssa Simone, *Resonance*, 2006.

My final installation, *Resonance* (Fig. 61) comprises three photographic images, each with an accompanying audio track. The images are of still, empty rooms or hallways where ‘unexplained phenomena’ have been captured by visitors to the Port Arthur Historic Site. Some of the images contain a few pieces of redundant or disused furniture. While the images are beautiful and meditative, the angle of view and the redundant furniture bestows the images with a sense of unease. The images are projected onto the wall. Each photograph is accompanied by a voice, describing an intangible experience.

Synchronicity

Through the development of *Resonance* I discovered synchronicity. During this time I was receiving email correspondence from the administration staff at Port Arthur. The staff would forward emails which concerned spirit photography. One email marked a critical moment in my work and subsequent research. The email was from a recent visitor to Port Arthur who had photographed an anomaly, and had no doubt in their mind they had taken a spirit photograph. In their description of their dual cognitive and physical experience they clearly described a profound change in their

perception of reality. The experience had provided them with an insight and understanding of their existence which was previously absent. This sublime, ineffable knowledge of reality they now possessed ultimately provided them with greater existential meaning. Following a brief investigation of the experience described in this email, I discovered that my work *Resonance* was the shadow of a phenomenon known as synchronicity. In order to learn more about synchronicity I read Jung's book on the subject.

The personal discovery of C.G. Jung's book *Synchronicity* was of significant consequence to my work. In the introduction to the book, Jung states that he is compelled to tackle the subject because his '... experiences of the phenomenon of synchronicity have multiplied themselves over the decades ...'¹⁸¹ In other words, he could no longer ignore these occurrences. In Jung I found a likeminded mentor who was essentially interested in the same questions of existence and had a similar experience of reality as I have had. Like Jung, I had experienced synchronicity myself and heard many accounts from others about the phenomenon. The book affirmed many aspects of my own thoughts and ideas concerning the subject of unexplainable phenomenon. Additionally, *Synchronicity* reinforced the prominent role fundamental physics plays in my work.

At this stage I decided to shift from photography to video. I had known this shift was to occur and had been thinking about how a moving, evolving image could express what I was endeavouring to convey. In this sense video seemed the perfect medium to express my ideas of transformation and what I had discovered about synchronicity. Additionally, using computer based animation I could create images unrestrained by reality and explore the metaphysical. Thus I created my first video based work entitled *Archetype*.

¹⁸¹ Jung, C.G. *Synchronicity: an acausal connecting principle*. Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 5.

Archetype

Like *Resonance*, *Archetype* was inspired by encounters with the inexplicable at the Port Arthur Historic Site. The work was a subconscious and intuitive response to the experience of synchronicity, and is indicative of the transformation of an individual's view of reality. Throughout my experimentation to create *Resonance* I thought a great deal about what I would create for this work. I had envisioned what I wanted to create. My aim was to utilise imagery which was universal, beyond language, therefore, I employed the use of archetypes.

The imagery in *Archetype* draws on several key elements of archetypal beauty. By this I mean that there exists a number of fundamental aspects which cross cultural boundaries where ideas of beauty are concerned. One such aspect is a general figural goodness, in other words, the form must be pleasing to the eye. The idea of figural goodness ties in with symmetry, one of the key fundamentals of archetypal beauty. Symmetry can be expressed in various forms, the most perfect is a sphere or a circle. Figure/ground contrast is also important to ideas of archetypal beauty, as this helps the image to stand out from the background as much as possible. Stimulus repetition is utilised to reinforce the concepts of beauty portrayed. I also propose that a response to beauty feeds into judgements of truth, therefore these qualities when utilised to enhance imagery will provide the viewer with more impact, as truth becomes bound with beauty.

The video portrays the metamorphosis of a small light into a large winged creature. Transformation or metamorphosis is an archetype. It is a fundamental aspect of our universe affecting many aspects of reality. The importance of transformation can be illustrated by pointing out any number of characteristics of the universe often in a state of transformation; day into night, order into entropy, life into death.

Light is also an archetype. Light is an essential ingredient of life. The sun is the source of light in our solar system, a constant round orb in our daytime sky. The orb or circle is often considered the most beautiful form in our universe, due to its perfect rotational symmetry. The circles or balls of light, known as orbs, are often a component of spirit photographs. Light is used in many cultures as a symbol for the soul. It is commonly used to describe elements of the transformative experience, often described as 'the light.' The light in *Archetype* very subtly flickers in and out of existence, this was inspired by sub atomic particles and their tendency to flicker in and out of our reality.

Prior to its transformation, the light moves in a spiral towards the centre of the screen. The spiral is a symbol which has been used extensively cross culturally since at least the Neolithic period. For *Archetype* the spiral symbolises the journey inward to the centre where the transformation occurs.

The image of a winged creature is an important element of my work. The winged creature is intricately bound with ideas of the spirit. They have been used to represent creatures of beauty and the idea of the spirit throughout human history. *The Dictionary of Symbols* by J.E. Cirlot claims that 'every winged being is symbolic of spiritualisation.'¹⁸² 'The butterfly or the moth is an ancient emblem of the soul' and the moth's 'unconscious attraction towards the light' plays a significant role in the connection with the spirit.¹⁸³ The winged creature is used in many cultures, with many deities, mythological creatures and beings represented in this way. The number of winged creatures throughout time is quite significant; angels, dragons, fairies, Pegasus the last winged horse from Greek mythology, Isis of ancient Egypt, Icarus and Hermes from Greek mythology, Mercury from Roman mythology and the holy spirit from Christianity, to name a few. I used insects as the archetype of the winged mythological beings.

¹⁸² Cirlot, J.E. *The Dictionary of Symbols*. Translated by Jack Sage, Routledge, London, 1971.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

To begin the creation of *Archetype* I collected images of butterflies, moths and other winged insects. Wings also conform to archetypal ideas of beauty in that they are striking example of bilateral symmetry. Butterflies and moths are additionally idyllic as they are known for their metamorphosis, from a caterpillar or grub into the beautiful winged creatures they become.

In addition, I examined images of winged creatures in flight to get a good idea of how they fly, preparing myself for any animation I would have to do.

To begin this work I first had to find software which would allow me to create what I had pictured in my mind. Particle Illusion suited my purpose. This program allows you to use three dimensional particle systems to create an infinite number of special effects. With the use of Particle Illusion I created a ball of light (Fig. 62). The program also allowed me to animate the object – moving it along a spiral path towards the centre of the screen. The light was then visually enhanced and altered in After Effects.

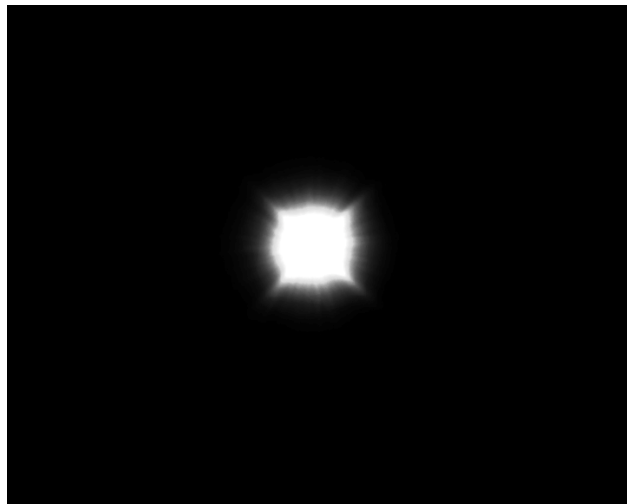


Figure 62 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, 2007.

I captured 3 seconds of a moth in flight. The footage was first taken into After Effects where I used keying effects to remove everything but the moth from the video frames. I altered the footage to have a black background and the moth occupying the centre of the frame (Fig. 63). The footage was then taken into Premiere and slowed down, this process took some time as

Premiere is not designed to slow footage down to the extent I needed for *Archetype*.



Figure 63 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, work in progress, 2007.

The footage of the wings was subsequently transferred into After Effects where glowing light effects and a swirling, constantly moving surface were added (Fig. 64).



Figure 64 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, 2007.

The metamorphosis from light into winged creature was created by using freeware software Fun Morph (Fig. 65).



Figure 65 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, 2007.

Finally, the audio was sourced from free samples available on the internet, and manipulated with the freeware program Audacity. The simple short sub-bass audio was manipulated to sound like the beating of the moth's wings. When the light appears on the screen there is silence until it begins to morph into the winged creature where the sub-bass pulsing sound emanates as it beats its wings. The sub-bass creates a powerful contrast to the silence at the beginning of the work, and imbues the metamorphosis with power and resonance. The sequence was then taken back into Premiere where the final edit to the audio was made.

Archetype was installed in a cell in the Separate Prison at the Port Arthur Historic Site as part of *The Port Arthur Project* for the 2007 *Ten Days on the Island*. When the viewer entered the Separate Prison a sub-bass sound was periodically heard emanating from a closed cell door. The work was viewed by looking through a small hole in the door, which the peep-hole mechanism once occupied (Fig. 66).



Figure 66 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, installation view, 2007.

The images appeared and faded on the sandstone cell wall opposite the door (Fig. 67). *Archetype* is brief in duration lasting only 18 seconds. The video loops, allowing the viewers repetition stimuli.



Figure 67 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, installation view, 2007.

A dim light was left on in the cell so the edges of the screen were not visible, creating a seamless projection on the wall (Fig. 68). The equipment was out of sight and the cell door locked, so the only way to view the work was through the small hole.



Figure 68 Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, installation view, 2007.

The original installation at the Port Arthur Historic Site cannot be recreated in a gallery. Without the ambience and atmosphere of the Separate Prison, the work stood to lose some of its impact if it were to be exhibited as a simple gallery video installation; more of a documentation of the work in its original context.

However, after much contemplation I found a solution to this problem. *Archetype* is installed with a theatrical technique known as Pepper's Ghost, a technique often used on the stage about a century ago. Today the technique has seen a re-emergence in popularity with the advent of video and a new plastic film which helps create large scale images. The viewer must once again view the work through a small opening in the wall, through the hole they will see a dimly lit room of the gallery. In the centre of the room *Archetype* will be projected. The effect creates a mesmerising ghost-like image apparently floating in mid air.

Finding a Visual Language for Transformative Experience

The creation of *Archetype* marked a pivotal point in my investigation. This work was the catalyst for the ideas for five new works which I developed

over the remainder of my candidature. *Archetype* instigated some insight into exactly what I was endeavouring to express. It gave me the ability to consciously recognise the connections between transformative experience and some fundamental elements which make up the universe. I realised that the transformative experience had reconnected me with nature as a fundamental, undeniable, essential part of myself. My aim was now to create a visual language which expressed the ideas behind the transformative experience. To begin this process, and in order to fully understand the realisations I had on a conscious level following the creation of *Archetype*, I researched the subject.

I began to research transformative experience and its associated elements under a variety of different disciplines. Sociology gave me an insight into the state of the contemporary Western individual and how they function in our society. I focused on the subject of sociology and religion. This aided me in grasping certain concepts surrounding the contemporary human condition, particularly the downfalls of contemporary society in terms of spirituality and our disconnection from nature. It gave me a backdrop, a setting for my conscious understanding of the transformative experience. Psychology was the science which studied the transformative experience. I researched this area as extensively as possible, as psychology had been investigating these experiences for around a century. During my research, I read numerous accounts of individuals who had undergone a transformative experience, the various subjective experiences gave me greater insight into my subject matter. A brief look into philosophy and the traditional metaphysical questions surrounding the human condition, gave me further insight into how such events in the individual's life were viewed throughout history. Comparative religion and mythology gave me an indication of the role the transformative experience played in belief systems. Finally, I looked into both quantum and fundamental physics as these branches of science had often been discussed in my research within the other disciplines. Most importantly I looked into how humans had expressed these experiences visually throughout history.

As a result of this research, I noticed a number of common elements, despite the apparent differences, between the disciplines, in particular physics, comparative religion and mythology.

In order to assimilate this information the first thing I did was to create a mind map on my studio wall. I realised I had been unconsciously incorporating universally understood visual elements into my work. This allowed me to see consciously what I was endeavouring to do. Common to the experience was the connection with nature and this was acknowledged in all of the disciplines I had looked at. This connection was at a very deep level, imbedded deep within an individual as a part inseparable from the whole of nature.

The conscious recognition of my personal experiences during transformative experience was extremely powerful, deeply personal and very emotional. My research had been very fruitful; I was better able to continue to create a visual language to express transformative experience.

Threshold

After creating *Archetype* and becoming familiar with the potential of the Particle Illusion software, I began work on *Threshold*. The work began by experimenting with transporting still images into Particle Illusion. Using an image from *Resonance* (Fig. 69), I added stars to the walls of the hallway. The 3D animation software allowed me to create stars that twinkled. I was also able to animate, move or multiply them. The effect enchanted me, I could see the potential of the software to create a type of alternate reality.

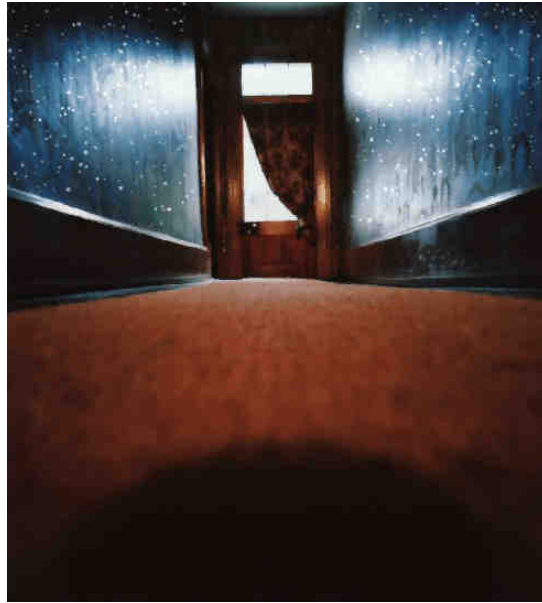


Figure 69 Alyssa Simone, *Experiment with Particle Illusion software*, 2009.

Early in my candidature, my interest in spirit photography, synchronicity and transformative experience, led me to quantum physics. One of the first books I read regarding this subject was Paul Davies *Other Worlds*, in which he describes the possibility that parallel worlds exist alongside our own and the possibility that they can sometimes overlap. The discovery that invisible realities were once again a possibility according to science was very exciting. When I came to experiment with Particle Illusion I was reminded of the possibility of other worlds, a concept which is interconnected with the transformative experience.

The possibility of alternate realities and parallel universes was a subject which I dreamt of and thought of a great deal in childhood. I began to video the places where I imagined other worlds as a child. There were three places which I thought I could use for this work; Fairy Glen, the forest near where I grew up, where all sorts of magical creatures lived; the archway in the Botanical Gardens (Fig. 70) which transported me directly to another world; and finally, the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 71), where I spent many hours studying the rooms of what felt to me like a giant dolls house, imagining the rooms coming alive at night.



Figure 70 Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, work in progress, 2009.

From the footage of the various locations mentioned above, the imagery at the Allport was the most successful. The museum is located on the ground floor of the State Library of Tasmania. The museum is completely separated from nature. Although some of the rooms are set up to look like they have windows, the curtains cover solid walls. The Allport has strict instructions that it was never to be photographed, although I was permitted to video it under strict supervision. While I was videoing the rooms, I noticed that there was a clock ticking in each room, and that every room had at least one mirror.



Figure 71 Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, work in progress, 2009.

Of all the rooms in the Allport, I found the bedroom (Fig. 72) the most captivating. The room is darkly lit and is set into a corner, making it quite

different from the other rooms. It has a beautiful four poster bed with golden fabric, grand ornate furniture and a mirror sitting on top of a chest of draws.



Figure 72 Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, 2009.

Like many children, I had a fascination with magic mirrors. The mirror/reflection as a portal into another world is an old idea stretching back in human history for thousands of years. The idea is celebrated in classic childhood fairy tales, such as *Snow White*, *Through the Looking Glass* and *The Magicians Nephew*. I decided to use the mirror as the portal to the outside world, to nature.

For the portal into nature, I used snow. I began by creating the snow in Particle Illusion. I watched many reference videos of snow to try to get a feel for the correct speed. If it was too fast, it looked like rain. It needed to float (Fig. 73).

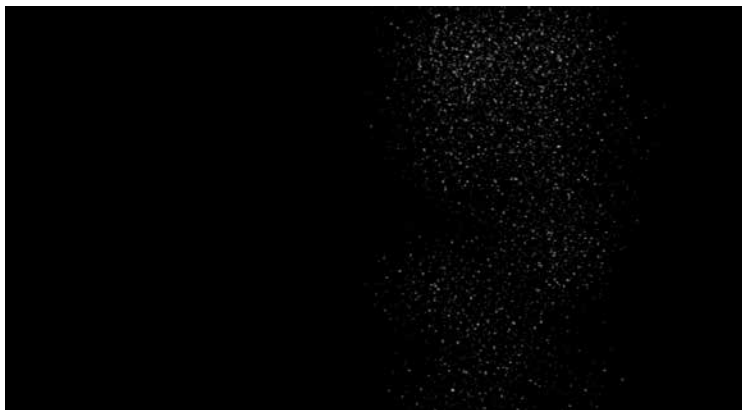


Figure 73 Alyssa Simone, *Snow created in Particle Illusion*, 2009.

Panning and having the snow only in the mirror presented some problems. I slowed the footage of the Allport bedroom down immensely in Premiere using the same techniques I had used for *Archetype*. I imported the footage of the bedroom and the snow into After Effects to be composited. Although the final product looks quite simple, it was tedious and complicated, as I frequently found myself working frame by frame to get it to look just right (Fig. 74).



Figure 74 Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, 2009.

The work was almost complete. While I had been working on it, I had been thinking about the audio that might suit the video footage. I had several small wind-up music boxes that I had bought in France some years before, and thought the sound from one of these would accompany the footage very well. At this stage, the video of the bedroom and the snow in the mirror reminded me of my music box.

When I was six, I was given a music box full of mirrors. I thought the music box was the most magical thing I had ever seen. A ballerina danced on a mirror platform, and mirrors at the back reflected the dancer from different angles. One day, not long after I got the music box, I was playing with a bottle of violet perfume. I accidentally spilt the bottle all over the inside of the music box, and the ballerina never danced again. Although it no longer worked, I kept the music box. It was always stored in a box with a few other precious things from my childhood. I did not want to part with the music

box, because it represented for me the magic that was ever present for me at the age of six, and keeping it has kept that feeling alive. I have rediscovered this magic through new experiences I have had as an adult, such as, synchronicity, spirit photography and the transcendent experience. Over the years the music box deteriorated to a general state of disrepair.

The music box seemed the most appropriate way to display this rediscovered magic. It has been restored sufficiently to install this work in it. The music box stripped of all its mirrors, and its mechanism exposed, has a small LCD screen installed in the lid in place of the old mirrors. The slowly panning footage of the bedroom at the Allport is accompanied by the sound of a hand wound music box being played very slowly, the tune is almost unrecognisable. The audio is played through a resonance speaker attached to an old wooden table on which the music box sits (Fig. 75).

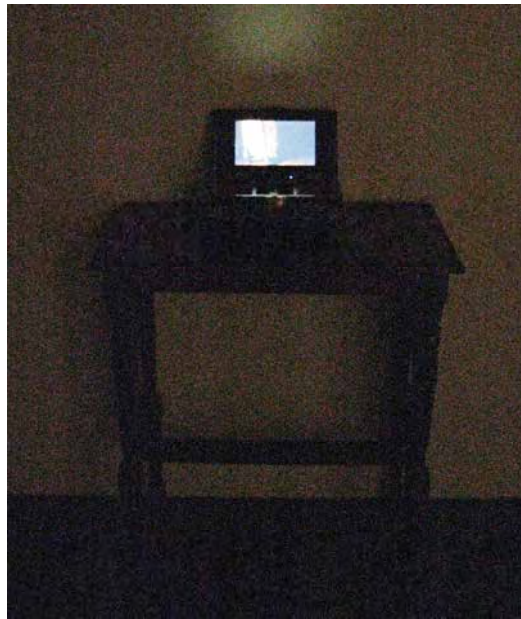


Figure 75 Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, installation view, 2009.

The resonance speaker uses any surface it is placed on as a speaker. The main characteristic of a resonance speaker in this context, is that the sound seems to be coming from the whole work. The work is dimly lit, so that as the viewer's eyes adjust, the exposed mechanism of the music box is just visible. As the video reaches the end of the pan, the mirror on the chest of

draws comes into view, it is snowing in the mirror. If you lean close enough you can smell violet perfume in the music box.

Lumen

Lumen is inspired by the golden section. The work's title simply refers to a measurement of light intensity. It makes lucent an underlying order in our reality, revealing a pattern which is often overlooked.

I began this work by experimenting with geometrical drawings. I obtained a book on designing and constructing geometrical patterns. I commenced drawing traditional geometrical symbols such as the vesica piscus, the golden rectangle and the golden spiral (Fig. 76).

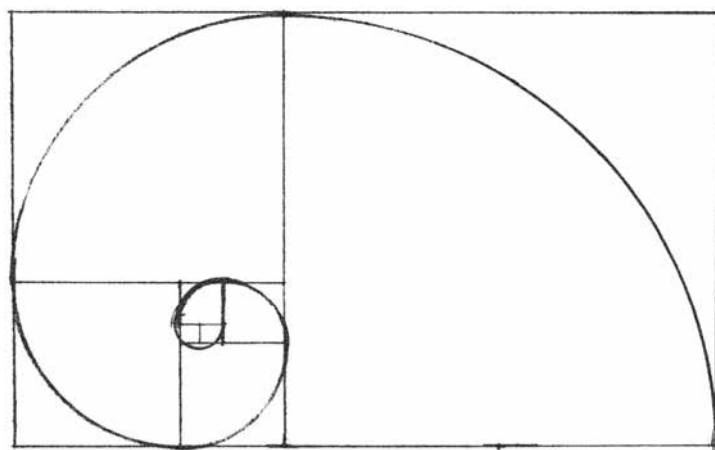


Figure 76 Alyssa Simone, *Drawing of a golden spiral*, 2008.

Drawing these classical geometrical figures provided me with the inspiration to begin drawing and designing my own unique geometrical designs (Fig. 77). I found that the drawings evolved by themselves from simple beginnings. The end results were often a surprise, and I frequently found them to be quite beautiful.



Figure 77 Alyssa Simone, *Drawing experimentation*, 2008.

I then began photographing forms from nature which are generally considered beautiful, and objects which additionally contain rotational or bilateral symmetry and/or spirals. I theorised that perhaps those qualities could reveal that the golden ratio was involved. They are the things I thought were beautiful, and fascinated me in my childhood, such as, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, shells, daisy clocks, star fish, flowers and seahorses. These objects are frequently clichéd or commercialised in Western society, especially by the advertising industry and *New Age* paraphernalia. The inherent beauty in these natural phenomenon has been to a great extent eroded. It was important to avoid this as much as possible. I began to experiment with photography, and made photograms (Fig. 78).



Figure 78 Alyssa Simone, *Photogram of seahorse*, 2008.

Then I moved on to traditional photography. Initially, I photographed using artificial light, to have maximum control over the final image (Fig. 79). I decided to change to natural light, and was very pleased with the effect.



Figure 79 Alyssa Simone, *Lumen*, work in progress, 2008.

Like Leonardo Da Vinci's *Virtruvian Man*, I wanted to marry the geometry with the form. I experimented with ultra violet ink. The ink soaks into the surface of fibre based paper readily, making the UV ink invisible when standard lighting is used.

After much experimentation and painstaking efforts to reveal the geometry of the objects I had chosen to photograph, I found that the drawings retracted from the sublime simplicity of the natural objects I had photographed. I did discover that the UV light created an interesting effect. It causes the images to emerge from the photograph, almost as if they are three dimensional objects.

Lumen is a series of six photographs of natural phenomenon, a flower, a starfish, a butterfly, a spiral shell, a seahorse and a daisy clock (Fig. 80). The photographs are black and white square images printed on fibre based paper and simply framed. The surfaces of the photographs are illuminated with ultra violet. The black and white images are enhanced by the ultraviolet light, accentuating the whites and highlights, adding luminosity and depth to

the photographic surface. The geometrical elements of each object is emphasised by the simplicity of the work.



Figure 80 Alyssa Simone, *Lumen*, installation view, 2010.

Although I had decided against using the geometrical forms I had drawn for *Lumen*, I employed them for my next work *Synaesthesia*.

Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia is inspired by my experience of seeing music during a transcendent experience. My vision was altered, influenced and seemingly caused by sound, forming images of patterns as I listened to the music. The term synaesthesia is used to describe a mixing of sensory information, this could include my above experience or a sensation such as tasting colours.

I began *Synaesthesia* by collecting patterns from different levels of reality. I found a drawing of the pattern Venus makes around Earth (Fig. 81) every 8 years (13 Venusian years). It is a five fold symmetrical pattern which corresponds with Phi, or the golden ratio.

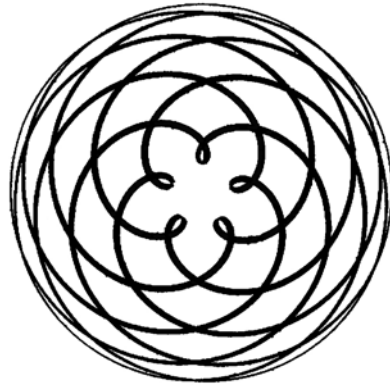


Figure 81 Alyssa Simone, *Drawing of the pattern of Venus*, 2008.

I also collected the patterns of X-ray diffraction images of atomic structure. Figure 82 below is one of the atomic structure of tungsten.

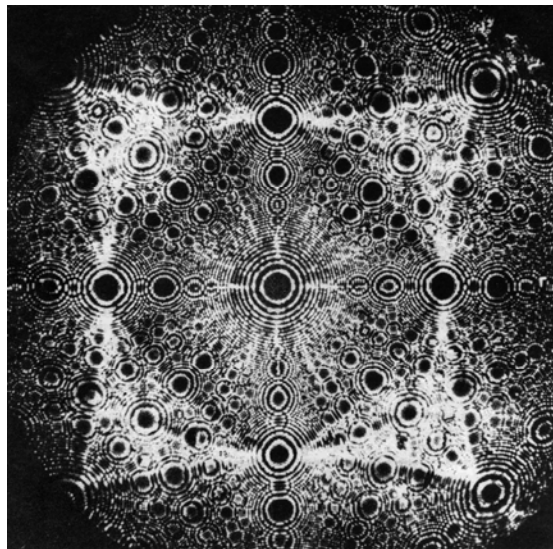


Figure 82 Erwin Muller, *Dancing Atoms*, X-ray diffraction pattern structure of atomic substance.

The other images are made from drawings of spirals which I mirrored in Photoshop (Fig. 83). I then imported the spirals into Particle Illusion, and overlapped them to produce the basis of the particle systems' movement in the animation.

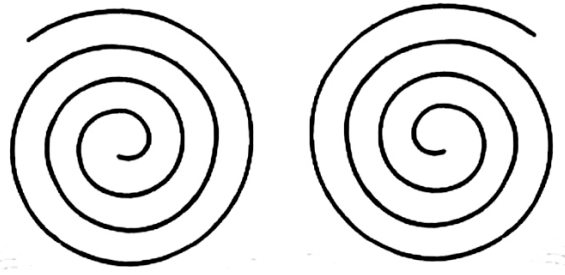


Figure 83 Alyssa Simone, *Drawing of spirals*, 2008.

Additionally, I experimented with animating my own drawings. Each image was imported into Photoshop where I altered them by reducing the design to simple line drawings. These images were then transferred to Particle Illusion where I animated them. By this stage I was very familiar with Particle Illusion, and created my own custom particles that were better suited to this work than any of the options available from Particle Illusions' particle libraries. The program allows you to manipulate the particles in order to create entirely new styles. I created long, snake-like, golden strands which I was able to animate using the patterns that I created and imported into the program (Fig. 84). After a certain amount of time the particles begin to disappear, fading from the image. The curves and the lines are not always perfect, creating a type of drawing with the animation as if it was produced by an unsteady human hand.



Figure 84 Alyssa Simone, *Synaesthesia*, 2008.

Audio is a very important element of the work, symbolising my fascination with the world as a child, and the idea for it in the work came quite naturally. It is created by running a finger over the rim of a crystal glass containing water. The glasses used for the recording varied in size and were filled with different amounts of water. The sound is quite mesmerising, and as it begins, it seems to be drawing the images. When you run your finger around the edge of a glass, the water in the glass vibrates in resonance with the vibrating glass, this resonance creates patterns in the water, this is known as cymatics (Fig. 85).

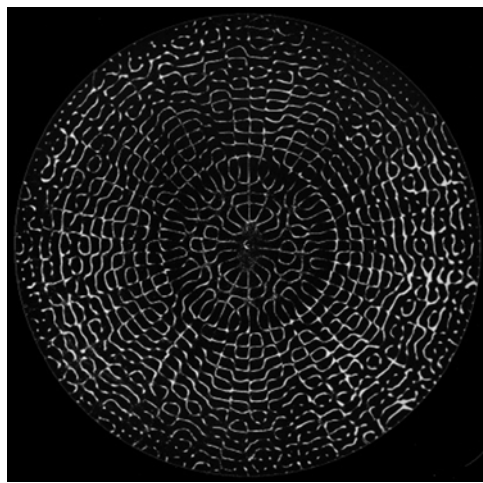


Figure 85 Hans P. Widmer, *Cymatics*.

The images are projected from the ceiling into a stone bowl of water which stands off the floor (Fig. 86). Water is a potent symbol for many aspects of human existence. The water has a personal relevance to my own transcendent experience, which was triggered by the ocean. The use of a stone bowl relates to the ancient divination method of scrying. The Ancient Greeks performed scrying by gazing with a relaxed focus into a vessel of water in order to see visions. The bowl for the installation has been chosen for its simplicity, as merely a vessel to hold the water. The bowl is relatively small in size, and raised off the ground to accentuate an intimate experience for the viewer.



Figure 86 Alyssa Simone, *Synaesthesia*, installation view, 2008.

Synaesthesia is viewed in complete darkness and the work itself is the only illumination in the room, making the bowl almost invisible. Images made of golden lines slowly draw themselves onto the bottom of the bowl of water. The images appear and fade, accompanied by a slow and strangely melodic sound. Above the bowl, the image is reflected onto the ceiling, creating a canopy of golden light.

Colours of the Darkness

Colours of the Darkness is the void, the constant ever present nothing. The black hole, the vortex. It is the necessary balance to light, pattern and beauty. It is the antithesis to *Synaesthesia*. Pattern and order dissolves into nothing when it reaches the event horizon, as in the black hole, here nothing can exist. It is acknowledged and revealed in the transformative experience, it is not seen as negative however, it is seen as a necessary balance to all that exists.

Initially, the work was in the form of a more traditional vortex (Fig. 87). The vortex here is made from a logarithmic spiral, it twists and turns during its short existence. At the end of the work the vortex transforms into a burst of light and disintegrates. This vortex was very organic. It is layered in such a way as to accentuate this characteristic. Although I was very happy with this

work, the vortex seemed too short-lived. I was seeking something with more substance.



Figure 87 Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, work in progress, 2008.

I began to experiment with Particle Illusion. I created many vortex animations, but they all seemed to fall short of the vision in my mind. Then a conversation with my three year old son changed the direction of the work. One morning while we were getting ready to leave the house, my son told us that sometimes there was a wheel which he saw spinning in his room at night. He told us it was really big and that it was made out of the colours of the darkness. The description of an object or vortex being made up of the colours of the darkness was perfect, and I began to experiment with this idea in mind. The first thing needed was to find a basis for my vortex. I searched for inspiration, and again decided to utilise the logarithmic spiral. This time however I chose the form that it takes within a sunflower (Fig. 88).

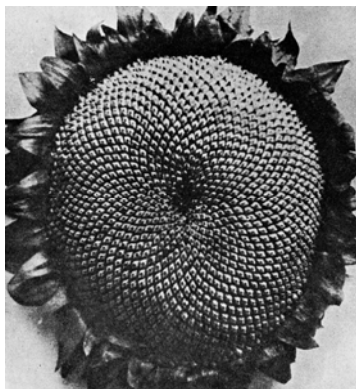


Figure 88 D'Arcy Thompson, *Sunflower*, 1948.

I created a simple drawing in Photoshop to act as a guide for the placement of each particle system in Particle Illusion (Fig. 89).

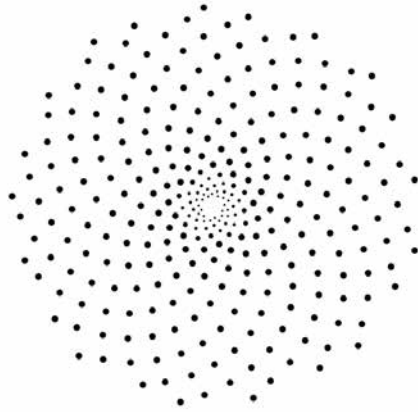


Figure 89 Alyssa Simone, *Logarithmic spiral pattern from sunflower*, 2009.

I created a completely new type of particle for this work out of a butterfly wing. I made the wing into a series of GIF images in Photoshop. I imported the images into Particle Illusion to create the new particle. I then animated each particle system so that each small wing travels along the arms of the spiral. As each particle moves, it leaves a trail behind it which lingers until the end of the animation (Fig. 90).



Figure 90 Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, work in progress, 2009.

The work eventually transformed into a series of logarithmic spirals composed of particles of light. The particles of light slowly rotate around the

screen and move towards the centre where they disappear into the void (Fig. 91).

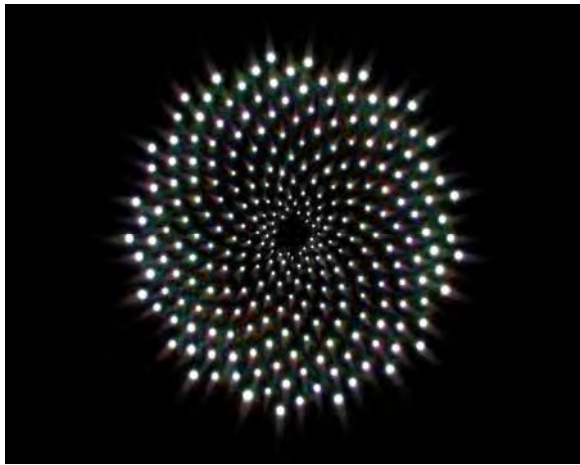


Figure 91 Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, 2009.

Swirling behind the particles of light are colours, the colours of the darkness. The work is projected onto the wall (Fig. 92). The work creates an optical illusion as it slowly spins on the wall, giving the impression that the one can fall into the void.

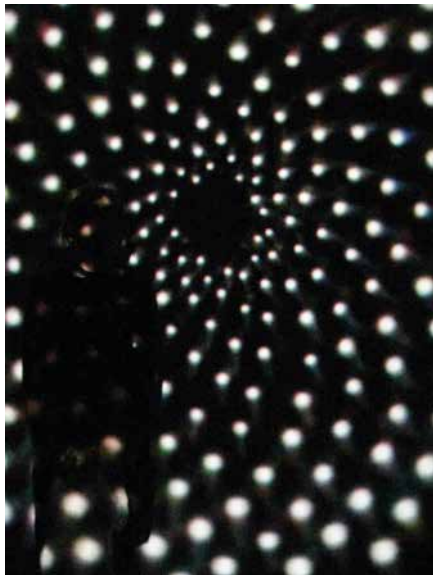


Figure 92 Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, installation view, 2008.

The audio for this work is a continuous sub-bass drone which pulsates as the vortex spins. This sound is accompanied by higher harmonic tones which is a distorted electronic version of the monk's chant of the Ohm. This was the

most powerful experience of sound I experienced in Nepal and wanted to replicate it for this work, the sound is constant until the image slowly disappears from the screen. While the sound is derived from the chant of the ohm and retains a certain amount of harmony, it is unrecognisable from its original source.

Psyche

Psyche is an expression of my own personal transformative experiences. I wanted a work which represented myself, and brought the experience back to a human level, therefore, I use an image of myself.

The work's title refers to the transformation of the human psyche. Psyche is the animating principle of the human being, the soul or spirit as distinct from the material vehicle or body.¹⁸⁴ In later Greek mythology psyche was personified as the beloved of Eros and was often represented in works of art as having butterfly wings or as a butterfly.¹⁸⁵ The work has undergone much transformation itself as the idea developed and changed over time. It began with the idea of the transformation of a butterfly, as a representation of the psyche (Fig. 93).



Figure 93 Alyssa Simone, *Psyche*, work in progress, 2009.

¹⁸⁴ Simpson, J. & E. Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Initially, I began to experiment with the notion of relating the stories of my personal transformative experiences themselves. There were three stories of transformative experience I recorded. The experiences are very personal and the tone of the work is that of telling a close friend. I also experimented with a form of language which is more disjointed and poetic. The three audio works would be installed along a hallway constructed in the gallery. The idea of the hallway/tunnel represents the journey from one state to another, the transformation or metamorphosis, an archetypal idea associated with both birth and death. The recorded stories were difficult to master, often sounding contrived and fake. Directly relating the stories subtracted from the experiences themselves. Like many others, I found the description fell well short of the actual experience, the words were a *pale reflection* of the experience.

During this time I was watching some home videos of my family. One video was my daughter laughing. She was a tiny baby and belly laughed for the first time. I had not seen the video before, even though my daughter was now two years old. I was struck by the way I was laughing when she laughed. I had never seen myself laugh like this before, it was a complete laughter, a complete emotion unadulterated by any self consciousness from being videoed. The laughter reminded me of an aspect of the transformative experience referred to as *the cosmic joke*.

The concept is related to the Jungian archetype of *the trickster or joker*, an archetype found in mythology dating back to antiquity. It is a realisation that lying beneath the entire universe is the cosmic joke, that the entire cosmos including the self, folds back on itself creating an eternal loop of ultimate meaning, infinite complexity and, at the same time and just as important, it is utterly simple and completely meaningless. This is the cosmic joke, when contemplated in certain states of consciousness, it is extremely, uncontrollably funny. Again it is a type of emotion which transcends the everyday experience of what we find humorous. I used my laughter from this video and manipulated the sound using an echo with intervals based on the Fibonacci sequence.

Using Particle Illusion I created a golden animation of a pattern bursting from a central single point of light into a circular pattern. The pattern is based on a refraction pattern of subatomic particles. We are all made of these subatomic particles. A photographic impression of them results in a beautiful symmetrical pattern. This relates back to realisations about the self and reality during a transcendent experience (Fig. 94).

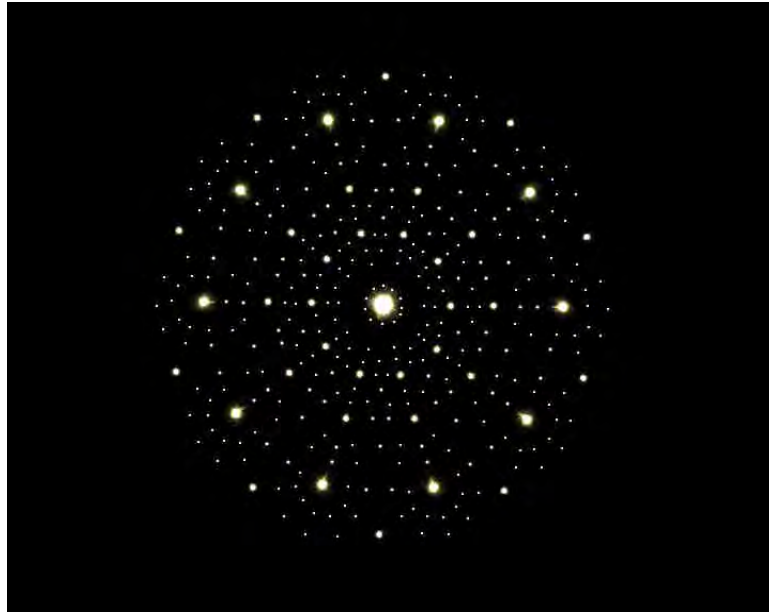


Figure 94 Alyssa Simone, *Psyche*, 2009.

To create the final effect I used a number of programs including Premiere, After Effects, Photoshop and Particle illusion.

The work is simply projected onto a wall. It begins with an image of me standing against a black background (Fig. 95). The pose I chose to use is one recognised from religions and belief systems throughout the planet.



Figure 95 Alyssa Simone, *Psyche*, 2009.

The image of me slowly transforms, I begin to glow until I completely transform into light. At the point where my image becomes completely white the sound of the laughter rings out. The white fades to black and bursts from the centre into a pattern of light. The pattern hangs suspended in the centre of the screen for a few moments before it slowly disappears star by star until the last one slowly fades from the screen.

Conclusion

My final installation of the works is like entering Plato's cave or the labyrinth. The viewer enters a darkened place of shadows. All is a reverberation of reality, a temporal, ephemeral transitory reality. Images flicker on and off across the various forms of screens. Sound permeates the space in every corner, and time is altered by slow motion and repetition. Photographs, stories, mirror realities, objects, patterns, geometry, symmetry, laughter and sub-bass resonating sounds combine to create seven works to articulate the ideas surrounding my transformative experiences.

Part IV: An individual vision of a universal experience

The body of work created in my investigation seeks to contribute to a visual language for the transformative experience and the ideas or concepts surrounding the immaterial/invisible aspects of reality.

My work contributes to the visual language of the immaterial by expressing the invisible as light pattern. These patterns are drawn from various aspects of nature at different levels of reality, that is, the extremely small to the very large. Additionally, many of these geometric patterns and ratios are fundamental to the design our physical bodies and also of our universe, thus exploring humanities intimate relationship with nature. My visual exploration of these ancient symbols and archetypal concepts utilise new digital technologies, thus creating a new subjective vision of an ancient experience.

Through the use of visual installation and sound I have created a completely immersing experience for the viewer. The viewer enters the gallery; a long wall greets them with a choice of direction. The labyrinth type layout moves them through a journey of discovery where they are able to see with my vision, that which is one of beauty.

Using a range of strategies and devices I have literally or physically recreated the experience of revelation in video and photographic form as a metaphor for spiritual transformation. The work connects the material and immaterial self through depictions of transformation from one state to another, that is, from material reality to immaterial reality and vice versa.

The final body of work links the idea of transformation and revelation to the experiences of childhood. These experiences are drawn from both my own childhood and that of my children. The final seven works embody a

culmination of ideas and experiences I have encountered since infancy. These events have profoundly enriched my existence. The exploration of the concepts surrounding my transformative experiences has resulted in a body of work which has reconnected me with my essential being. In creating this work I have been able to gain an insight into the significance of my in-between moments, thus, deepening my understanding of that which lies beyond the limits of normal human perception.

My children have inherited my pop-up book and, like me, they too are fascinated with that in-between moment. While driving home the other night my 6 year old son said, “I think in that moment just before you die, you suddenly know everything.”

Appendices

Appendix I: Bibliography

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Appendix II: List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements Illustration

A pair of snakes, Basohli painting.

Scanned from: Rawson, P. *The Art of Tantra*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1973.

Figure 1

Image from my pop-up book.

Scanned from: *The Human Body: A three dimensional study*.

Figure 2

Alyssa Simone, *She Hesitates*, 1999.

Image from series *She Hesitates*, Silver Gelatin Print, 8cm x 10cm.

Figure 3

Alyssa Simone, *Before the World Was Made*, 2003.

Video Still from *Before the World was Made*, duration 3:24 minutes.

Figure 4

William Mumler, *Master Herrod with the spirits of Europe, Africa and America*, 1870-72, Silver Gelatin Print, 10 x 6cm, The College of Psychic Studies, London.

Scanned from: Chéroux, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, p. 26.

Figure 5

M.J. Vearncombe, *Psychograph*, 1919.

Silver Gelatin Print, 10.4 x 12cm, private collection.

Scanned from: Chéroux, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, p. 90.

Figure 6

The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2005.

Scanned from: Chéroux, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, front cover.

Figure 7

Madge Donohoe, *Skotograph*, c.1930.

Silver Gelatin Print, 8 x 10.7cm, The College of Psychic Studies, London.

Scanned from: Chéroux, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, p. 99.

Figure 8

Debbie Malone, *Photograph of orbs moving around frame*, c.2001.

Colour Digital Photograph, Courtesy of Debbie Malone.

Figure 9

The New Scientist, *Midnight Watch*, 1999.

Scanned from: Coghlan, A. 'Midnight Watch', *New Scientist*, No.2165/6/7, 26 December – 2 January, 1998, pp.42 – 43.

Figure 10

Theodor Prinz, *A Ghost*, c1900.

Silver Gelatin Print, 22.8 x 17cm, private collection.

Scanned from: Chéroux, C. *The Perfect Medium: photography and the occult*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, p. 70.

Figure 11

Ken Kesey, *Poster for Acid Test*, Muir Beach, United States, 1965.

Sourced from: 'Our Kind of Music', <<http://ourkindofmusic.wordpress.com/>> (accessed 16 September 2010).

Figure 12

Graham Hale, *New Age shop and Healing Centre*, Market Place St Albans, Herfordshire, UK, 2009.

Sourced from: *Geograph*, Photograph by Graham Hale,

<<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1523842>>, 2009 (accessed 26 October 2009).

Figure 13

Eleusian Mysteries.

Sourced from: Taylor, T. *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*. Sacred Texts, 1891, pp. 105-106. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com>> (accessed 18 June 2008).

Figure 14

Boom Festival, Portugal 2008.

Sourced from: *Boom Festival*, <<http://www.boomfestival.org>> (accessed 13 October 2009).

Figure 15

Ayahuasca Retreat, Peru.

Sourced from: *National Geographic*,

<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/0603/features/peru.html>> (accessed 26 October 2010).

Figure 16

Traces du sacré, Centre Pompidou, 2008.

Sourced from: 'Traces du Sacré', Centre Pompidou, <<http://www.centrepompidou.fr>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

Figure 17

Angelica Mesiti, *Rapture(silent anthem)*, 2009.

High Definition Video, Duration: 10min 10sec.

Cinematography: Bonnie Elliot

Sourced from: *Angelica Mesiti* website, <<http://www.angelicamesiti.com/rapture.html>> (accessed 6 February 2010).

Figure 18

Michael Cross, *Bridge*, 2006.

Installation.

Sourced from: 'Michael Cross' website, <<http://www.michaelcross.eu/bridge1.html>> (accessed 26 March 2008).

Figure 19

Keiko Mukaide, *Memory of Place*, 2007.

Glass and water installation, dimensions variable.

Sourced from: *Scottish Arts Council* website, photograph by Shannon Tofts, courtesy York Museums Trust,

<<http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/artsinscotland/crafts/features/archive/keikomukaide.aspx>> (accessed 26 March 2008).

Figure 20

Bill Viola, *The Passing*, 1991.

In memory of Wynne Lee Viola, Videotape, 54 minutes.

Sourced from: School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia,

Photograph by Kira Perov,

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/artarchitectureanddesign/events/artistspeak/artistspeak2010.asp>> (accessed 5 August 2009).

Figure 21

Bill Viola, *Departing Angel* from *Five Angels for the Millennium*, 2001.

Video/sound installation, dimensions variable.

Sourced from: Bill Viola website, <<http://www.billviola.com>>, Photograph by Kira Perov, (accessed 14 November 2008).

Figure 22

Bill Viola, *Fire Angel* from *Five Angels for the Millennium*, 2001.

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Sourced from: Bill Viola website, <<http://www.billviola.com>>, Photograph by Kira Perov, (accessed 14 November 2008).

Figure 23

Bill Viola, *The Fall into paradise*, 2005.

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Sourced from: James Cohan Gallery, <<http://www.jamescohan.com/artists/bill-viola/>>, photograph by Kira Perov, (accessed 12 March 2010).

Figure 24

Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007.

Video/sound installation, dimensions variable.

Installation view: Church of San Gallo, Venice.

Sourced from: Sourced from: James Cohan Gallery, <<http://www.jamescohan.com/artists/bill-viola/>>, photograph by Kira Perov, (accessed 12 March 2010).

Figure 25

Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007.

Video/Sound Installation, dimensions variable.

Installation view: Church of San Gallo, Venice.

Sourced from: Sourced from: James Cohan Gallery, <<http://www.jamescohan.com/artists/bill-viola/>>, photograph by Kira Perov, (accessed 12 March 2010).

Figure 26

Sri Yantra, c1700.

Scanned from: Lawlor, R. *Sacred Geometry: philosophy and practice*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1982, p. 9.

Figure 27

William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*, 1794.

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Sourced from: Artcyclopedia, <<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/masterscans/124.html>>, (accessed 26 September 2009)

Figure 28

Leonardo da Vinci, *Human Figure in a Circle and a Square, illustrating Vitruvius on Proportion*, 1485-90.

Pen and Ink, 34.3 x 24.5cm, Accademia, Venice.

Scanned from: Honour, H. & J. Fleming. *World History of Art*. Laurence King, London, 2002. p. 484.

Figure 29

Leonardo Da Vinci, *Sketches of plans for a church*.

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Figure 30

Piero della Francesca, *Baptism of Christ*, c1445.

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Figure 31

Salvador Dali, *The Sacrament of the Last Supper*, 1955.

Oil on canvas, 267 cm x 166.7 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

Sourced from: National Gallery of Art website,

<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2010/dale/dale_flyer.pdf>, (accessed 26 May 2009).

Figure 32

Mark Rothko, *Orange and Yellow*, 1956.

Oil on canvas, 231 x 180.3 cm, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

Sourced from: Albright-Knox Art Gallery website,

<http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Pollock_1.html>, (accessed 2 February 2010).

Figure 33

M.C. Escher, *Butterflies*, 1950.

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Scanned from: Ernst, B. *The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher*. Random House, New York, 1976. p. 107.

Figure 34

Vine scroll motif, Tarxien Temple, Malta 3-2000BC.

Scanned from: Honour, H. & J. Fleming. *World History of Art*. Laurence King, London, 2002. p. 50.

Figure 35

William Blake, *Satan in his Original Glory: 'Thou wast Perfect till Iniquity was Found in Thee'*, 1805.

Pen and ink and watercolour on paper, 429mm x 339 mm, Tate Gallery. London.

Sourced from: Tate Gallery website,

<<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=1144>>, (accessed 26 September 2009).

Figure 36

Ajit Mookerjee, *Vibrational image of the sound, Om*.

Scanned from: Lawlor, R. *Sacred Geometry: philosophy and practice*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1982, p. 87.

Figure 37

Gustave Dore, *Purgatorio and Paradiso Canto 31*.

Scanned from: Dante, A. *The vision of purgatory and paradise*. Translated by Henry Francis Cary and illustrated with the designs of Gustave Dore.

Figure 38

Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967.

Sourced from: Art : 21, Art in the twenty-first century,

<<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/nauman/card1.html>> (accessed 25 March 2009).

Figure 39

Jordan Belson, *Allures*, 1961.

Sourced from: Centre for Visual Music, <<http://www.centreforvisualmusic.org>>, 1996 (accessed March 25 2009).

Figure 40

Jordan Belson, *Allures*, 1961.

Sourced from: Centre for Visual Music, <<http://www.centreforvisualmusic.org>>, 1996 (accessed March 25 2009).

Figure 41

Thomas McIntosh, *Ondulation*, 2002.

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Figure 42

Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2004.

Sourced from: 'The Unilever Series: The Weather Project', *Tate Modern*, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/eliasson/>>, 2008 (accessed 19 November 2008).

Figure 43

David Johnson, *Facing the Dark*, 2000.

Sourced from: *David Johnson*, <<http://david-johnson.co.uk/intro.html>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

Figure 44

David Johnson, *Imaginary Landscape no.2*, 1997.

Sourced from: *David Johnson*, <<http://david-johnson.co.uk/intro.html>>, 2008 (accessed 18 August 2008).

Figure 45

Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Bass Straight, Table Cape*, 1997.

Sourced from: *Hiroshi Sugimoto*, <<http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/>>, 2009 (accessed 15 March 2009).

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Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Paramount, Oakland*, 1994.

Sourced from: *Hiroshi Sugimoto*, <<http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/>>, 2009 (accessed 15 March 2009).

Figure 47

Nina Fischer and Maroan El Sani, *Aura Research*, 1994-2005.

Sourced from: Nina Fischer and Maroan El Sani Website, <<http://www.fischerelsani.net>> (accessed 27 March 2009)

Figure 48

Alyssa Simone, *These photographs were taken within seconds of each other. The first shows a prominent orb near Josh's head, the second is taken closer but shows the orb has gone.* 2004.

Colour digital photograph.

Figure 49

Alyssa Simone, *Close up of orb*, 2004.

Colour digital photograph.

Figure 50

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

Silver gelatin print.

Figure 51

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.

Silver gelatin print.

Figure 52

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.
Silver gelatin print.

Figure 53

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.
Colour photograph.

Figure 54

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.
Colour photograph.

Figure 55

Alyssa Simone, *Resonance*, 2006.
Colour photograph.

Figure 56

Alex Cairns, *Floating orbs*, c2004.
Colour digital photograph, Courtesy of Alex Cairns.

Figure 57

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2006.
Colour photograph.

Figure 58

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2004.
Digital image.

Figure 59

Alyssa Simone, *untitled*, 2006.
Digital image.

Figure 60

Alyssa Simone, *Resonance*, installation view, 2008.
Colour digital photograph.

Figure 61

Alyssa Simone, *Resonance*, 2006.
Colour photograph.

Figure 62

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, 2007.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, dimensions variable. Duration: 18 seconds.

Figure 63

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, work in progress, 2007.
Single channel video.

Figure 64

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, 2007.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, dimensions variable. Duration: 18 seconds.

Figure 65

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, 2007.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, dimensions variable. Duration: 18 seconds.

Figure 66

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, installation view, 2007.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, speakers, DVD player, dimensions variable.
Duration: 18 seconds.

Figure 67

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, installation view, 2007.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, speakers, DVD player, dimensions variable.
Duration: 18 seconds.

Figure 68

Alyssa Simone, *Archetype*, installation view, 2007.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, speakers, DVD player, dimensions variable.
Duration: 18 seconds.

Figure 69

Alyssa Simone, *Experimentation with Particle Illusion*, 2009.
Digital still.

Figure 70

Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, work in progress, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 71

Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, work in progress, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 72

Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 73

Alyssa Simone, *Snow created in Particle Illusion*, 2009.
Digital still.

Figure 74

Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 75

Alyssa Simone, *Threshold*, installation view, 2009.
Single channel video, stereo sound, wooden music box, lcd screen, resonating speaker,
DVD player, table, dimensions variable. Duration: 1 minute 34 seconds.

Figure 76

Alyssa Simone, *Drawing of a golden spiral*, 2008.
Pencil and ink drawing.

Figure 77

Alyssa Simone, *Drawing experimentation*, 2008.
Pencil and ink drawing.

Figure 78

Alyssa Simone, *Photogram of seahorse*, 2008.
Silver gelatin print.

Figure 79

Alyssa Simone, *Lumen*, work in progress, 2008.
Silver gelatin print.

Figure 80

Alyssa Simone, *Lumen*, installation view, 2008.
Framed silver gelatin prints, 50cm x 50cm, ultra violet light.

Figure 81

Alyssa Simone, *Drawing of the pattern of Venus*, 2008.
Digital drawing.

Figure 82

Erwin Muller, *Dancing Atoms*, X-ray diffraction pattern structure of atomic substance.
Scanned from: Lawlor, R. *Sacred Geometry: philosophy and practice*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1982. p. 109.

Figure 83

Alyssa Simone, *Drawing of spirals*, 2008.
Pencil and ink drawing.

Figure 84

Alyssa Simone, *Synaesthesia*, 2008.
Single channel video.

Figure 85

Hans P. Widmer, *Cymatics*.
Scanned from: Lawlor, R. *Sacred Geometry: philosophy and practice*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1982. p. 87.

Figure 86

Alyssa Simone, *Synaesthesia*, installation view, 2008.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, stone bowl, water, speakers, computer, dimensions variable. Duration: 3 minutes 47 seconds.

Figure 87

Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, work in progress, 2008.
Single channel video.

Figure 88

D'Arcy Thompson, *Sunflower*, 1948.
Scanned from: Weyl, H. *Symmetry*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952. p. 71.

Figure 89

Alyssa Simone, *Logarithmic spiral pattern from sunflower*, 2009.
Digital drawing.

Figure 90

Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, work in progress, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 91

Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 92

Alyssa Simone, *Colours of the Darkness*, installation view, 2009.
Single channel video projection, stereo sound, speakers, computer, dimensions variable.
Duration: 3 minutes.

Figure 93

Alyssa Simone, *Psyche*, work in progress, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 94

Alyssa Simone, *Psyche*, 2009.
Single channel video.

Figure 95

Alyssa Simone, *Psyche*, 2009.
Single channel video.

Appendix III: List of Submitted Work

Resonance, 2005-10

Single channel video projection, audio track, computer, speakers, dimensions variable. Duration: 2 minutes 52 seconds.

Archetype, 2007-10

Single channel video projection, stereo sound, glass, speakers, computer, dimensions variable. Duration: 18 seconds.

Threshold, 2007-10

Single channel video, stereo sound, wooden music box, lcd screen, resonating speaker, DVD player, table, dimensions variable. Duration: 1 minute 34 seconds.

Lumen, 2008-10

Framed silver gelatin prints, 50cm x 50cm, ultra violet light.

Synaesthesia, 2008-10

Single channel video projection, stereo sound, stone bowl, water, speakers, computer, dimensions variable. Duration: 3 minutes 47 seconds.

Colours of the Darkness, 2008-10

Single channel video projection, stereo sound, speakers, computer, dimensions variable. Duration: 3 minutes.

Psyche, 2009-10

Single channel video projection, stereo sound, speakers, computer, dimensions variable. Duration: 1 minute 27 seconds.

Appendix IV: Curriculum Vitae

Personal

Alyssa Simone lives and works on Bruny Island with her young family.

Education

- 2004–2010** ***Doctor of Philosophy***
Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania
- 1997–2000** ***Bachelor of Visual Arts, Honours Class 1 and the University Medal***
Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

Awards and Scholarships

- 2004** ***Australian Postgraduate Award***
University of Tasmania
- 2001** ***University Exchange, Ecole Regionale des Beaux Arts***
Saint Etienne, France
- 2000** ***Fauvette Loureiro Memorial Artists Exchange Scholarship***
University of Sydney

Group Exhibitions

- 2008–2010** ***Parallel, Travelling exhibition***
Victoria and South Australia
- 2008** ***Parallel,***
Long Gallery, Hobart
- 2006** ***The Port Arthur Project, Ten Days on the Island***
Port Arthur, Tasmania
- 2003** ***Artlessness***
Art Space, Sydney
- 2002** ***Knock Knock***
First Draft Gallery, Sydney
- 2000** ***A Thousand Words***
First Draft Gallery, Sydney
- 1999** ***Sublime Absence***
Smith and Stoneley Gallery, Brisbane
- Degree Show***
Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney
- 1998** ***Edge of the World Film Festival***
Theatre Royal, Hobart
- Degree Show***
Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney
- Standing Still and Shaking***
First Draft Gallery, Sydney
- Tangent***
Publication of the University of Sydney
- 1996** ***Edge of the World Film Festival***
Cinema Afterdark, Hobart
- Deceased***
Entrepot Gallery, Hobart
- 1995** ***Rapid Eye Movement***
Couch Culture Exhibition Space, Hobart